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A  
NORSEMAN'S VIEWS  
OF  
BRITAIN & THE BRITISH



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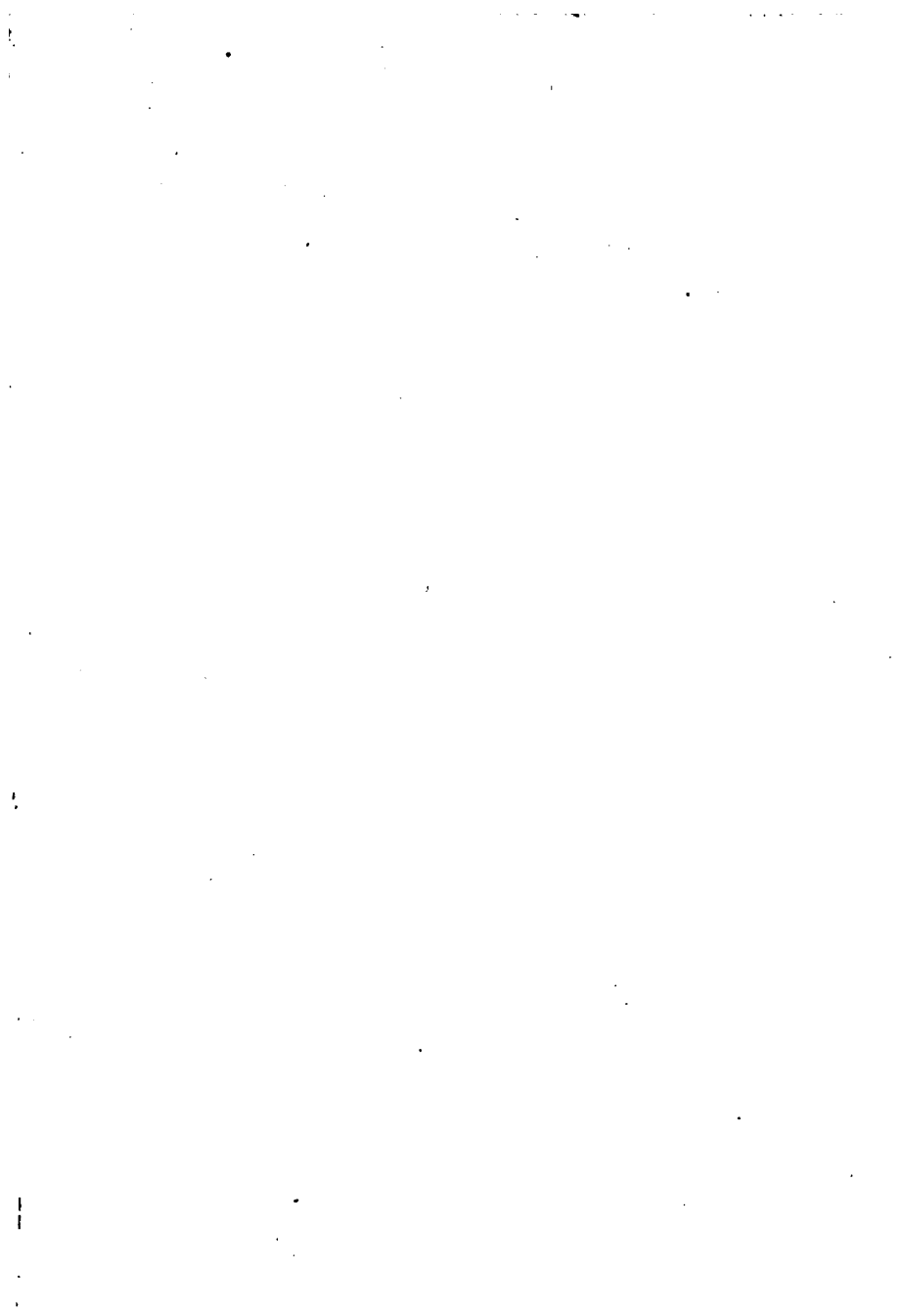
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DANISH CONSUL AT THE PORT OF BOSTON  
FROM 1859 TO 1894

Received 14 March, 1902.









A NORSEMAN'S VIEWS  
OF  
BRITAIN AND THE BRITISH.



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# NORSEMAN'S VIEWS

OF

## BRITAIN AND THE BRITISH.

BY  
A. O. VINJE,

ADVOCATE BEFORE THE HIGH COURTS OF JUSTICE, CHRISTIANA.

EDINBURGH:  
WILLIAM P. NIMMO, ST DAVID STREET.  
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TO  
J. WELHAVEN,

*Professor of Philosophy in the University of Christiana.*

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YOU will, on comparison, observe that, in the language of these Letters as they now appear before you, many alterations have been effected. When I fixed my resolution to publish them in this country, it became an urgent necessity to submit them to the revision of a native pen. No man can ever judiciously pretend to write, even respectably, any but his mother tongue. I have no wish to appear before the world other than I am; and I take this opportunity of acknowledging my gratitude to the gentleman who bestowed such pains and care upon my manuscript. My task of wrestling with a foreign language was, perhaps, equally difficult with his of mastering foreign views. Our conjoint labours are before you. Overlook their imperfections, and remember only, if they have any, their merits.

EDINBURGH, *May 28, 1863.*



# BRITAIN AND THE BRITISH.

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## LETTER I.

EDINBURGH, *2d February 1863.*

DEAR SIR,—I came to Britain, as you are aware, with the fixed resolution of examining and studying the institutions of this great commercial land, and the manners, habits, and pursuits of its people. The twelve months which have now nearly elapsed since my arrival, I cannot accuse myself of having entirely misspent. I have wandered far, seen much, and learned something. I have been a dweller in ancient cities and rural villages ; inspected iron-works, coal-pits, dockyards, and agricultural operations. I have played the pedestrian for hundreds of miles, backwards and forwards, through the lonely glens and sheep-farms of the Scottish highlands. I have witnessed military displays on Wimbledon Common, and beneath the Crag of Arthur's Seat. I have listened to debates in the Houses of Parliament, and spent weeks in the Great Exhibition. I have even caught a distant glimpse of a fox-hunt. Out of all this, I have gleaned and garnered up some facts and reflections which I shall lay before you from time to time. The interest you take in matters of this sort goes far to satisfy me that you will not regard the perusal of my somewhat lengthy epistles altogether in the light of an infliction.

It may appear to you curious that, landing as I did on a foreign shore an utter stranger, I should refrain from using my letters of introduction. Such, however, is the case. I have them still in goodly numbers occupying an honourable place in my writing-desk. And why? Because it is an opinion I hold, that the formal visits, invitations of ceremony, and parties of pleasure, which are the usual results of letters of introduction, teach a man nothing. They are in all nations the same, their character being generally 'much ado about nothing.' They contain, moreover, this element of evil, that they may very easily engender prejudices and prepossessions in the mind of the stranger. I therefore prefer to remain unknown, and from my obscurity study *real* life. Some of my countrymen, however, at the Great Exhibition, were of a decidedly different frame of mind; and their perseverance in importuning our Secretary of Legation, our Consul, and Commissioner, for tickets of invitations to parties and festivals, made me oftentimes feel pity for these pestered officials, and ashamed for their persecutors. I have no prejudices against parties and festivals, but having seen and tasted much of them in my day, I can afford to do without them. Of course, if a man be anxious to push himself forward in the world, or if he be on the outlook for a rich wife, the case becomes very materially altered. Although, how such motives could affect my countrymen attracted to London by the Great Exhibition, I am at a loss to discover.

One evening I followed a different method, and put myself under the guidance of a London detective, whose acquaintance I had purposely made. Among the indescribable haunts of misery and crime, I on that night learned more of modern civilization than was possible in the suffocating crowd of the Guild-

hall festival, though in neither society do I think that much is to be got worth the keeping. Extremes are always unsound in the body politic as well as in theories of art, and they always correspond. Given the one, you can easily find the other; 'tis but to solve the equation. For every rich man, there are hundreds, or even thousands of destitutes, just in proportion to the rich man's wealth. But enough of such truisms.

To write much about the Exhibition would be here out of place. I will only make a remark concerning this word *Exhibition*. The English language has the Gothic word for exhibition. 'Show' is just the same as our '*sjaa*,' German '*schau*,' Danish '*skue*.' The pronunciation of this word does not differ so much in these languages as the spelling, and we and the English give it quite the same sound. But this excellent native word is not, it would seem, fine enough for shows of art and industry. It is, however, thought good enough for shows of pigs and dogs, while the Latin word exhibition must take its place on occasions of high festival. We thus see the middle ages at work even in the languages of the present day. The native tongues are thrown to the irrational: Latin is reserved for the rational creation. It is not then to be wondered at if these tongues become corrupt, and in a manner half extinct; and we really find them so, in proportion as the civilization of the middle ages prevails more or less in this or in that land or district. Indeed, many people are of opinion that civilization has not yet got the length of some districts where the good old tongues are spoken in comparative purity.\* It is much to be regretted that a portion of the veneration which we see bestowed upon 'old families,' is not given to the old languages.

\* See Appendix.

No doubt a good breed or race has always played an important part in the history of mankind. The kings of the different tribes of Goths always claimed to be descendants of Odin. It was the same in Greece with Hercules, and it is so even now in England with the Conqueror. This taste for pedigree, ancient and modern, is the same thing couched in other words. It is a question of race. It matters little whether Odin was the son of a god or not. To descend from him was not the less to be of a good breed, which was accordingly reckoned as something sublime and awe-inspiring. There mingles a good deal of this feeling in the present rage for being of 'good family.' People may not go quite the length of calling a good family something godlike, but there is, at all events, the haze of a halo around it.

In England, as I intend shewing more clearly further on, there yet exists, more strongly perhaps than in any other country, a pious awe for these old breeds. It is very natural and logical, therefore, that England, among the European countries, should be at the head of a scheme for the regeneration of our domestic animals. You must not misunderstand me. I value this step as much as any man. Why, I have even written poems for cattle shows, and so provoked a periodical to declare that my muse would inevitably descend to write odes on manure. It is, indeed, this very predilection of mine for such things which induces me to treat them in a rational manner, and to search for the logical link between them and this prominent idea of breed in the history of mankind. I am seeking for reason and coherence, and, without going so far as some learned men in their disputes about the missing link between the gorilla and the man, I go pretty far.

The Yankees, who carry European principles a good

length, and, of course, English ones further still, have had even their shows of children, quite in the style of cattle shows. There were prize-judges and inspections, just as of the lower animals. These were classical, and perfectly in the spirit of the Greeks of old, who said, 'We improve the breeds of lower animals, and consequently we ought to do so with the higher ones; and most of all with the human race, which stands on the highest step of the ladder of creation.' To gratify my predilections for cattle shows, I visited the great one at Battersea, and I really assure you that one consequence of my visit has been a disgust for ham. I can never forget the monstrous pigs there exhibited. The animals lose, by crossings and breedings, whatever natural grace they possess. But insulted nature revenges herself; for a great number of the poor creatures are, I am told, choked by feeding, and diseases very often prevail. In spite of my realistic tendencies, therefore, I can never believe in this realm of flesh, and should it ever succeed, I could not enjoy it. Englishmen may be different.

It struck me as curious that you seldom saw, among the visitors to these monstrosities, radiant faces, betokening either self-ridicule, or indeed anything to shew that they were above this realm of flesh. It was positively dreadful to watch the grave, business-like manner in which people waited upon the animals, and went along files of manufactured flesh. Give them their due, they were certainly clever at their business; but I tried in vain to find out something spiritual in their features and behaviour.

The English give very high-sounding names to these fleshy monsters. It seems, indeed, to be the fate of great men to live after their death in the names given to horses, bulls, pigs, and dogs. Even during a man's life-

time, his name may be bestowed upon a horse, but you will seldom find any one admitted among dogs till long after death. Cæsar is a very common name for dogs, but Napoleon has not as yet got further than horses. When more hallowed by time, he will certainly rank with dogs. Balder, our old god of innocence and light, is now a dog. Even I myself, not to speak vainly, am already a horse, and with so good a beginning, I may perhaps entertain the bright hope of becoming in time a dog.

The International Exhibition was a show of the world in every sense of the word. It was said of H. Grotius, that his learning could not be written though the firmament were paper and the ocean ink. This saying would certainly be more applicable to the Great Exhibition, which literally beggared all description. I have seen water under hydraulic pressure oozing through thick iron tubes. Impressions something akin to what I then experienced I often felt when sitting under the 'dome,' and gazing on this 'greatest of great sights.' All individuality disappeared. Even the Icelandic, Thorvaldsen, with his Mercury before the Danish court, sank into insignificance. So likewise did even Shakespeare, as he sat admiring, as it were, the wealth of England. The whole of mankind appeared in its right place as a single individual. What did it matter that weapons of war and engines of destruction were there to be seen as well? Side by side with them were balsams and remedies to heal all the wounds they inflict. The English press put forth many clever articles concerning the Exhibition; but, when it turned out that the enterprise did not sufficiently pay, most of the newspapers changed their tone, and rated it soundly, just as the Russians do with Saint Nicholas when he will not grant their prayers.

It was very expressive to call this Exhibition 'the World's Fair.' The intention of making money was obvious both in the managers and the exhibitors. There was a jealousy among the latter, which plainly shewed that it was neither more nor less than a market; and some of them who did not get prizes quarrelled and abused the jurors, and on some occasions used even violence. Some exhibitors characteristically enough made out in money the disadvantage they incurred by not getting a prize for their wares. This struck the public mind, and the jurors were execrated. And yet people dream that such exhibitions are the real promoters of peace! They are rivalry, and must as such promote war. Envy and mercantile opposition displayed on so great a scale are not likely to promote peace, whatever else they do. They will drive individuals and nations to loggerheads. They have done so since the creation of mankind. Appropriately enough, then, the models of guns and targets were to be found in the midst of all these works of peace, as they were called. It was only further necessary that specimens of warriors from every land should have been exhibited at the same time, because, as it always has been, it will surely be, that the strongest arm and the stoutest heart will gain the battle in spite of every improvement in the science of war. We need not try to avert it, people will end as they began, and fight tooth and nail. These improvements in the science of war can reasonably lead to nothing else. People, however, may have recourse to the knife instead. It is really a solace to think that sometimes blood is shed to wash away for a time the dirty spots contracted by these 'works of peace,' and that we sometimes see men testing the temper and edge of their weapons, instead of hearing them perpetually asking, 'Do you think it will pay?'—I am, yours very truly,

## LETTER II

EDINBURGH, 9th February 1868.

SIR,—It is a common remark that all people are good when we know them, and that we condemn them because we don't know them. There is undoubtedly some truth in this, as in most popular sayings. I will, however, be a little more concrete, and say, that the great bulk of the people of every nation is good, in the same way as the majority is healthy and well made, and the sick and deformed only exceptions. There is in the world but a percentage of sin and sickness—about as great as the average rate of interest on money. When the moral and physical interest is usurious, social order becomes endangered—bankruptcy is imminent.

Be this as it may, the great body of most nations is kind and good, at all events I have found it so in my wanderings, and Britain is no exception to this cheering experience. Let me, however, bring some facts under your notice, they will better explain my meaning.

When I landed near London Bridge, I addressed a man who had come to meet some acquaintance that he expected to arrive by our steamer from the Continent. I asked him for some hints as to lodging and the like, and he acted as a most excellent friend. He took such a deal of trouble with me during the whole of my stay in London, that I really got ashamed of all the kindness he shewed me. He was a Londoner by birth, and a character such as 'Bob,' in Jerrold's 'Family Disgrace.' He was buoyant and sanguine, and when he met with disappointment in one business, he became inexhaustible in new schemes. He was just about starting a company, and I went with him to some merchants in the city, and to a

chemist to whom he shewed his specimens. They all received him kindly, and with the most unsuspecting confidence. No doubt men of business must often run some risk in order to do business, and the prosperity of English merchants sufficiently proves that this mode of procedure is the right one. Too great wariness leads to nothing. It is deeply rooted in our nature to gamble ; and I must confess that I like better the English and American passion for companies, horse-racing, and the other amenities of sporting life, than the continental lotteries and gambling-houses. It is the same thing in another, and, if you please, in a national shape. I am, of course, speaking here of unsound companies and speculations, into the machinery of which, I on this occasion got some glimpses. I saw false statements and attestations, from authorities in different sciences and trades. My friend was of course a very honest man, and often complained of the sins of the world. I tried to speak words of comfort, and shewed him the redeeming side of such businesses as he was engaged upon. The fact is, it does no good to preach sermons against such things for many of these business men do not believe in a hell, or if they do, they think it is time enough to reform when they have grown rich and respectable. The best way, therefore, is to treat them as an artist treats his model, or a medical man a corpse. Poor 'Bob!' did not seem to derive much comfort from such consolation, more particularly as he got disappointed in his schemes just by these very sins. But his happy temperament made him soon forget all his disappointments. I one day suggested to him that he should leave London, and go among the Yankees. He stared me full in the face, 'I have been there,' he replied, 'but London is a paradise compared with New York.'

In one of the hotels where I used to dine, I one day made an overture of conversation to a gentleman with a good-humoured face, who sat opposite me. I found him affable, and not a little anxious to learn from me what my impressions of England were. At our parting he strongly advised me not to miss the review at Wimbledon. Finding myself at leisure, I followed his advice. Among the crowds hurrying forward with the same object as myself, it was with real pleasure I again recognised my hotel friend. But on arriving at the ground I found the barrier was impassable, except on payment of a sum which I had not taken into account when reckoning my expenses, and which I was consequently without. My companion saw my embarrassment, and, presenting me with a ticket, bade me, in a jovial tone, to come along. I expressed my astonishment at this act of generosity, bestowed, as it was, upon a foreign stranger, regarding whom he knew nothing. 'All right,' said he, in reply, and thrusting his arm into mine, dragged me within the barrier. I record this fact, one out of many, as an example of the kind open-heartedness of the British people. I have read of such things, but was scarcely prepared to experience them in my own person.

I know not whether my companion meant it as an anti-thesis or not, but while we were admiring the splendid appearance of the troops, and the regularity and precision of their movements, he suddenly turned upon me and asked, if I had ever heard in my country the saying of Napoleon, 'That the English were a nation of shopkeepers?' I told him that I had, and further added, that I thought Dickens' amendment on the imperial remark, 'That the English were a nation of gamekeepers,' had as much justice in it as its original. Sweeping generalities, when applied to nations, are always absurd. It is quite natural

that Britain should be chiefly a trading country, and leave war to France. 'Tis a division of labour at once natural and advantageous. The geographical positions of the two countries, and the different temperaments of their inhabitants, demand an arrangement of this nature; and the world at large, and they themselves, are all the better for it. France withal plays the sacrificing part in the drama. Her wars do not bring her the wealth which commerce brings to Britain. But to sneer at such a constitution of things is certainly out of place.

I got tired of London, its bustle and its din; and in order to make the change as complete as possible, I betook myself to the far-off valley of Glencoe. It is believed that Ossian was born and brought up in this dale. If Ossian be more than a myth, and his poems anything but ballads composed and improved by each succeeding generation, like the songs of our *thelemorkish* folk, Glencoe would be a cradle worthy such a poet as Ossian, or rather Ossian would be worthy such a birthplace as Glencoe. It is indeed set down as the most romantic dale in the Scottish Highlands. It much resembles, on a small scale, the Vestfiordale, and many of our Norse dales. The very same features and formations of valleys and mountains present themselves to you, and were it not its treeless aspect, you might, standing there, dream that you were at home. I often did so, and almost at the sea level I walked about with the impression that I was among my native hills some three thousand feet above it. Some brushwood appeared to indicate the near neighbourhood of the sea, but the prevailing nakedness told a different tale, and so I dreamed on, in spite even of the softer outlines which told me that the mountains, at a later period, had been washed by the waves. It is, indeed, a beautiful country, and many a dale and mountain-range

suggested the idea of a petrified surf. There, you could imagine, were waves and whirlpools, and here windings and topping peaks. The *terra firma* is everywhere, however, an image of the sea, and I always feel as if I were floating on the swell of the waters, sometimes borne gently along, as in the south of England, at other times tossed wildly about, as in the Scottish Highlands.

There is a small river in Glencoe called Cona, and Ossian was called 'The sweet voice of Cona.' It is an admirable expression borrowed from nature, as all real poetical expressions are. I often sauntered along this river listening to its murmur. It was like the voice that had sounded in my childish ears, and quick as thought I was the child and shepherd-boy again; but alleviated of the load that weighs on the melancholy mind of advanced boyhood. Life becomes lighter as we draw nearer and nearer the top of the mountain, whose steep ascent made our youthful shoulders stoop, and we die, like Moses, on the very summit. Life, in general, is thus; and they are only fools and outcasts who sigh again for childhood.

I was one day strolling along Cona, in the company of a German painter. Suddenly, under our feet, in a deep crevice, we heard the bleating of a poor lamb that had fallen, and could not get up. We tried our best to rescue it, but in vain. We called to a shepherd on the hills for assistance, but neither he nor his dog could get at it. At last I discovered a slope, down which I crept, and plunged into the stream. The painter and the shepherd followed, and we rescued the poor lamb, its only injury being a bleeding nose. I am satisfied that England was not half so well contented, as I was then, when she saved Turkey. We returned in a dripping state to our kind host and hostess. To ward against the evil effects of cold on our-

selves, and to celebrate properly the rescue of the lamb, we sat down to some very superior toddy. I insisted upon pledging the poor lamb in the first bumper. Our host acted as chairman, and proposed a vote of thanks to me, as the main deliverer of the lamb, and I thanked them in humble terms for the high honour they had done me. A better or a kinder-hearted people you will meet nowhere, and yet many of them are hunted from their native homes like foxes. But regarding such proceedings and the characteristic saying of one of these human hunters, 'Tenantry will not pay, let me have sheep,' I will say more in a future letter. No doubt the virtues of sheep are many. They furnish wool for the manufacturers, and mutton for the wealthy. Yet even in the rich agricultural counties a very small portion of the people can afford to eat mutton. They live truly like beasts of burden. Animal food they seldom or never taste.

The name of the shepherd whom I have mentioned was Macdonald, a descendant of the old Macdonalds of Glencoe. He now tended sheep on the very ground where his forefathers were murdered, about the beginning of the last century, in the *unique* 'Glencoe massacre,' which, by the way, bids fair to 'damn to everlasting fame' the name of William of Orange. This Macdonald was a strong, good-looking youth. What a noble race these Caledonians are! It was regiments of them that stood like a wall against the Imperial Guard at Waterloo. It is all very well to have sheep instead of people in these Highland nurseries for soldiers, but sheep will not repel invasion, or fight England's battles. Perhaps the consumers of mutton in the large cities, tradesmen, operatives, and artists, will fight well. This remains to be seen. England thinks so, but history tells a different tale.

Old history, however, may not be trustworthy on this point. Let us then wait for the new one. When men now-a-days are shooting and feeding sheep where the Caledonians lived in days of old, they no doubt think that great progress has been effected. *Nous verrons.*

The Highlands is a graveyard, and the passing bell seemed ringing in my ears as I saw parish on parish laid out for sheep. How very picturesque! exclaimed some Londoners, as their carriage bowled along through this wilderness. Picturesque! certainly. Come hither, my artist friend, when you design a sketch from Faust, throw me in those Scottish Highlands as a scene for Mephistophiles to gloat over pleasantly. That worthy cursed mankind for being so tenacious of life, and he would exult to see human beings making way for sheep, and grouse, and deer. Some day he may probably see the greater part of Europe in this condition. The Highlands are but the beginning of the end. It is the beginning of a higher civilisation, we are told; but independent people do not like this civilisation. They emigrate to America and Australia, where they can get a spot of ground to cultivate for themselves, leaving Europe with its immense cities, and sheep, and sporting landlords, to become incentives to the derisive smile of Mephistophiles.

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### LETTER III.

EDINBURGH, 16th February 1863.

SIR,—It is a theory inculcated by ethnographers that the superiority of the British people is due to the cross mixture of races from which it has sprung. Celts, Romans, and different tribes of Goths, have been mingled together,

and an admirable compound is the result. My limited knowledge of the workings of nature in this way will not allow me to enter upon such a subject. I can however say, from my own experience, that I have felt unusually well here in Britain. I have grown stronger, and even my rather elderly face has, I think, lost some of its wrinkles. Perhaps the 'roast beef of old England,' renowned in song, and the adulteration of brandy and tobacco, which prevents me over-indulging in these luxuries, can account for this well-being. But I prefer to attribute it to the island air, and the delightful temperature. The climate is invigorating, and even the smoke and coal dust are healthy.

Yes, I feel very well here in Britain, be the true reason for this what it may. And from my own case, I infer the healthy state of the inhabitants. The British are really a good race. You cannot be long among them before you see that. In the south of England you can clearly trace the prevalent infusion of Roman blood, but as you go northwards you discover more and more of the Gothic, till you come to Yorkshire, and Scotland, where the relationship to the Scandinavian tribes is obvious. In Scottish cities, more particularly in Edinburgh, I can almost fancy that I am walking in our Norse towns. The Scots are, in general, heavier than the English, and in battle-line they must press on more irresistibly, by the mere weight of body. The Scottish militia is one of the finest I ever saw. It is really hard to exchange such men for sheep! But this blessed mutton for the immense cities, and the wool for the manufacturers, are redeeming considerations to so painful a policy. The Caledonians, with a few exceptions in the middle Highlands, appear to have mingled with the Scandinavian tribes around the sea coast, and in the adja-

cent dales. The islands, and some counties, such as Caithness (Katanes), are purely Norse.

A schoolmaster in the western Highlands told me that his forefathers came from Norway; 'because you see,' said he in proof, 'I am red haired.' But if red hair came from Norway, it has surely improved very much since the time of old *Thor*, because it is generally to be seen here softened down almost to silk, while the red hair of our battle-god stood up like bristles. But *Thor* has such a family likeness to Jupiter, that his red hair probably indicated something akin to thunderbolts. Perhaps also this softening down of the red hair, may only indicate that people are no longer so warlike as they were. The features of the Caledonians are, however, easily traceable among many of the Scottish people. Walter Scott is a good instance of this. His statue in Princes Street, in Edinburgh, with the head something like a sugar-loaf, indicates a Caledonian. I saw numbers of such heads in the Highlands, and the many names in 'Mac,' tell also of Caledonian origin. Brave fellows all, and not easily beaten, even by the Roman legions.

It would almost seem as if the Caledonians and the Norsemen had divided the Highlands between them, calling the mountains by a Celtic name 'Ben,' and the waters by a Norse name 'Loch,' evidently our log-water. These names would very well agree with the original sway of either people, if this explanation could be relied upon. But I am not so deeply read even in the old Gothic languages, except, perhaps in old Norse, that I venture to set such things down as certain. I shall not therefore bother you with a long enumeration of such names. I will only mention the common Scottish name, a 'firth,' or 'frith.' This is clearly our 'fiord,' the old genitive

of which is '*fiardar*,' nom. plural '*firdir*.' The ending '*ir*' being thrown away, and the old '*ǣ*,' the same as the English '*th*,' the old English pronunciation of which is partly retained in Denmark, the identity of the two words is obvious. It will be an interesting task for modern Gothic philologists to make up such names on which I stumbled at every step in England, but more plentifully far in Scotland.

The British people, taken as a whole, are a strong people. But the differences in race among the European tribes I do not think is so great as many suppose. Perhaps, however, the more remote relationship between the Latin and the Gothic race can cause some important difference. I take it that the climate, the soil, the mode of living, and the social conditions, make up the differences, if such there be in reality. Of course, there are differences, or rather peculiarities, just as there are differences among individuals of the same family, and among families of the same community. But I do not think it will do to search for real differences among the European nations of the Gothic race. They are all alike good, or all alike bad, as you please, and history does not warrant you in giving a prominence to any of them. Of course, the German fifty, and the British thirty, have, in the last centuries, done more than the Scandinavian ten millions; but this is a question of quantity, not of quality. Perhaps the French forty millions have effected most. But all such comparisons are uncertain, and only apt to foment national vanity, and excite mutual jealousies. Every one has its share in the progress of mankind, and it is, at all events, too early as yet to say which has borne the greatest. In colonisation, England has, of course, outstripped every competitor. So did Spain two or three centuries ago; but history does

not thank Spain much for her colonisation ; and the oldest and greatest English colony bids fair to prove the same failure as the older dependencies of the crown of Spain. The other colonies will probably follow the same example in due time. There is no reason whatever why they should not do so. The same transfer of English customs and institutions must inevitably lead to Yankee results without English feudalism as a counterpoise. When a people despises an aristocracy of intellect, it must have an aristocracy of birth. When it will not submit to mind, it must, like the children of Israel in the desert, dance round a golden calf. A mob cannot govern.

It seems to me a fact, that Scotchmen are more enterprising than Englishmen, even in emigration. They are always to be found among the explorers and leading men of distant colonies. The jealousy existing between Scotchmen and Englishmen, and the remnants of their old national hatred, ought to make a foreigner chary of relying upon either of them, when judging of each other. We and the Swedes are much better friends than they are. I have, therefore, independently endeavoured to form my opinion of the mutual relations between them, and have come to the conclusion that the Scots are the superior people. The more mountainous country is sufficient to account for this; besides, the popular education is much better in Scotland than in England, if the Lord Advocate is to be relied upon. In a speech at Glasgow, he said :—‘ We had an act of 1616, which provided that there should be a school in every parish in the kingdom—a thing which the English have never accomplished, but which was established in this country in what has been called a barbarous age.’ My own experience, and that of other foreigners I have spoken with, certainly convinces me that the Scottish population,

as a whole, stands intellectually higher than that of England. But such fleeting experiences are often very fallacious. True it is, indeed, that Englishmen are rather prone to carry with them English peculiarities wherever they go round the globe, whereas Scotsmen can more easily divest themselves of such peculiarities. And this I should think is a good proof of superior intellect and education.

These however are odious comparisons, and as such I will drop them, and say a little more respecting the British climate and its influence upon the inhabitants. This island climate gives a fine skin, of course, when people are washed; and the upper classes lash themselves literally into a soap rage. People must appear civilised, and it has been said that the civilisation of a country can be measured by its consumption of soap. This soap civilisation has apparently originated among vapours, coal and smoke; for it would never do in a country with dry and pure air, where it would only crack the skin. The British are certainly good-looking, but I have been disappointed in not finding the aristocracy the best looking portion of the population, as I have often been led to believe. I saw the House of Lords; I lounged for weeks in Rotten Row, where the great people drive; I went often to the operas, the theatres, and concert-rooms in the season, and saw a good deal of the aristocracy, both males and females; but I found the middle classes much better looking. This, however, is natural. The higher and the lower classes in society must, from their very living, be on the whole disfigured—the one from want, and the other from debauch. Of course, I saw excellent specimens of both these extremes; but as a whole, the middle class bears away the palm. The beauty, the strength, the genius of a nation lie in the middle classes. A Stephenson can emerge from the lowest classes, and a Byron

from the highest; but Shakespeare, and most other great men, are from the middle classes. Of course, statemanship is to be found mostly among the aristocracy, because the privilege rests there; but even in this aristocratic domain, the middle classes must sometimes be resorted to. Gladstone, for example, is the son of a wealthy merchant; and there is such a 'dearth of fame' among the upper ten thousand, that old prejudices must give way, and accept the son of a Jew as a recognised leader of the conservatives. From an intellectual point of view this is poor, very poor, but consoling, very consoling, for the sake of humanity.

In England, however, the aristocratic body is considered to be better looking than the 'dregs of earth,' as non-aristocrats have been termed. I have heard people speak about West End noses as being altogether different from those in the Eastern parts of London. The boundary between aristocratic and plebeian noses is supposed to be somewhere about Charing Cross. I yield, of course, to the superior knowledge of Englishmen in such purely national matters, but I saw many a nose that would have guaranteed its owner's reception into West End society, in the City, and even in the vicinity of London Dock.

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#### LETTER IV.

EDINBURGH, 23d February 1863.

SIR,—I came to Britain with the common prejudice of the Continent, that the British were a grave and reserved people. Not but what they are grave and reserved enough, but they are very erroneously represented when said to be more so than other people. I would even go further and

say, that they are at once more confiding and more cheerful than the other Gothic tribes. Their relationship with the people of southern Europe is also in this instance apparent. To me they seem to be at once as open and confiding as I could wish ; and I hope to shew that they are very far from meriting the witty Frenchman's reproach, '*ils s'amusement tristement*.' Perhaps they do so when compared with Frenchmen and Italians, but compared with us and the Germans, they are lively and pleasing. They must not, however, be judged from their appearances on the streets, where they move along as if they were trees, all of a sudden endowed with a talent for walking. When passing from one duty to another, we speak and laugh at our ease along the street. Not so the Englishman. Much, however, of this grave and business-like demeanour is, I think, to be attributed not so much to real gravity, as to the depressing yoke of one of those tyrannical fashions with which social life in Britain abounds. There is a prejudice that people who talk and laugh on the streets are idlers. A London merchant told me that he dared not to smoke a cigar in the streets before four o'clock, for fear of being considered a man who either had no business, or if he had, did not attend to it. Let the reason for this demureness be for the rest what it may, certainly I do not think it can be accounted for by a natural gravity in the people, especially when such facts as the following are considered.

At public meetings and lectures, of which there is always here a goodly stock, you hear such cheers, hisses, and clamour, that you might almost fancy you had got, by some mistake, into the midst of a drunken rabble. It is, however, only a boisterous nature giving unmistakeable signs of vitality, or perhaps a noisy party-spirit dealing whole-

sale with an opponent's arguments. Such meetings recalled vividly to my mind the descriptions I have read of the renowned Yankee platforms, where a butcher may be seen, with tucked up sleeves, demonstrating political principles to a roaring audience. I do not here speak of Garibaldi meetings at Birkenhead, or in the London parks, where the opposite parties knock each other down with cudgels and such like prostrating arguments for the Holy Father and Garibaldi; but I am relating scenes that take place on occasions of some moment and dignity. I went, for example, to the famous university of Edinburgh to hear the inaugural speech of Principal Brewster. In no theatre did I ever hear such noises, or witness such behaviour. There was, of course, a comparative lull during prayer, and when the reverend Principal spoke. But even then the amusements of the audience were anything but sad. There was hissing, and shouting, and throwing of peas and herrings, and waving of hats and sticks, producing on all sides of me a noise that was deafening. It was difficult for me, under such circumstances, to realise the fact that I was sitting among students, who, from their pursuits and aims in life, should likewise have been gentlemen. Such conduct would have been set down as disgraceful in the boys of a village school; and I was thankful when I escaped from the meeting with unbroken bones. It would, however, be out of place to expect much gravity or staidness from young students. But what will you say to the fact that the members of the Scottish Philosophical Institution in Edinburgh hissed Thackeray for some passages in his lectures? Cheers and hisses have then, you will see, a twofold character among the British. They serve as a kind of amusement for the young, and do duty as arguments for a more advanced and

more sensible age. This remark holds good, not only for drinking-bouts and merry-makings, but even for grave and solemn occasions. In the House of Commons, and even in the House of Lords, I heard a good deal of this kind of amusement, and of this mode of argumentation. I heard their Graces groan like some very earthly beings. It was a sound that relieved me from the dead weight of reverence which a sight of the House of Lords is well calculated to inspire. The wigs and robes floated away in a cheerful dissolving view, and I felt I was still among human beings, with whom it was possible to speak, and laugh, and indulge in pleasantries.

If there be anything national in Britain, it is certainly sport. Young and old, rich and poor, seem to be possessed by a passion for this. They fish, and shoot, and race, at home, and wherever they are all over the world; and they do so with a passion so intense, that it really amounts to a solemn and business-like pursuit. Art, as in the greatest artists, has become nature. There is to me something very amusing in their grave faces and anxious eyes when casting about for a salmon, or dashing away in red coats after a poor fox. I defy you to gather from their demeanour that they are sporting. They are solemn as dervishes. To encounter a sparrow or an eagle, a rabbit or a lion, a fox or a warrior, is all the same. Equal gravity marks the sportsman. It must have been this intensity of feeling which tempted the Frenchman to say, '*ils s'amusement tristement.*'

This national bent for sport has created a sporting literature. It is reported as a feat when a nobleman shoots some grouse, or kills a salmon. Packs of hounds are written about just as we write about men of merit; and the gentleman who owns a good pack is of high respecta-

bility: When a man of note dies, it is usually mentioned among his other great deeds that he was fond of fishing; was an admirable sportsman, and reared excellent dogs. Many of these necrologies reminded me of the saying of a certain Professor, who was an excellent Hebrew scholar and a keen fisher besides. Speaking of one of his pupils, 'It is curious,' he said, 'that he does not thoroughly understand Hebrew when he is so fond of fishing.'

During the past winter the Earl of Wemyss was entertained at a public dinner, on occasion of his being presented with his portrait by a number of noblemen and gentlemen, as a mark of their appreciation of the able, courteous, and impartial manner in which he had, for many years, discharged the duties of 'Master of the Hounds.' I have seen this picture, which is much admired. It represents the Earl mounted on his hunting horse, 'Dumfries,' and surrounded by his hounds. At the solemn dinner, fox-hunting was called a 'noble art,' and among other things it was said, 'At Oxford, Lord Wemyss learned and imbibed one of the most useful of all lessons a young man gets at college, viz. :—the love of fox-hunting. . . . Had not Lord Palmerston been a fox-hunter, he never would have been Prime Minister of England.' Of course, such an assertion was received with cheers and laughter; but I am tempted to believe that there was really more of earnest than of joke in the saying. Another speaker went on to say, 'This portrait is to be engraved, and I venture to predict that it will be hung up in the most honoured place in every castle, in every hall, and in every house in both countries where there lives a man worth his salt.' This picture is in good British taste, for pictures and engravings of sporting scenes, hounds and hunters pursuing wounded stags and foxes, adorn the walls of every ale-

house. Walter Scott sang in lofty strains of such deeds. The Prince of Wales could not seemingly pass for a man before he had hunted. No wonder, therefore, that a well-to-do farmer regards a pack of hounds for his son as the first step to his becoming a gentleman. In this, I should think, lies the great secret of this universal love for sport. It is a fashion. Cotton lords and other wealthy people lease and let shooting moors in the Highlands. They play at being lords. And why not? It is unnecessary for them to work or think seriously. The days of sport have come. They can now indulge in the 'noble arts,' and be somewhat looked up to by the people. It is, however, very seldom they can manage to get at foxes; these are reserved for old estates and men of long pedigree.

When Louis the Fourteenth grew bald and put on a wig, all fashionable society put on wigs also. This is the old story always new; and so I should think it must in a great measure be with British sport, at least as regards people who have to work and think. At these sporting meetings people of humble station also catch glimpses of the upper classes which must be very gratifying and consoling. A person even hinted to me that he got his situation because his father once happened to be matched in a game against a nobleman, whom he took care to allow to win. Here you have a sporting principle for the appointment of public functionaries. There are, besides, cups and other premiums for sporting and racing, all which make it easy to explain the public taste for such things, more especially when it is remembered that much of all this is a substitute for gambling-houses. Granting, however, all this, it is certain that the common people in Britain are more given to sport than the same class on the Continent. A generation or two ago, we Norsemen

sported and gambled more than we do now. The same may be said of Sweden and Germany. England is, in this respect, as in many others, 'old England.' On the Continent, many antiquated feelings, and notions, and pursuits, have, during the last century, been swept away. Our judges gave up their wigs more than a hundred years ago, but in Britain they are still as imposing as ever. There is a common cause for all these things, and a connecting link between them, of which I purpose speaking in a future communication.

In the short intervals between wars, it was of old a pursuit for kings and their retainers to indulge in sport, just as we now-a-days see it is among all wild tribes. As the true representatives of conservatism, European monarchs still adhere to this time-honoured habit. They have parks, and it was in Poland, some years ago, a royal pastime to hunt the ure-ox. Humble courtiers ran the game within easy reach of the royal rifle; and monarchs thus gained renown as good shots. It was a harmless repetition of Cleopatra's artifice when she caused the cured fish to be attached to Anthony's hook. The courtiers, however, dare not give their respective monarchs the advice which the Egyptian queen gave the indignant general when he discovered the deceit practised on him; and it is perhaps better for the world at large that august persons should while away their time in childish pursuits.

There is, therefore, something kingly in the British passion for sport. But even this will not suffice to explain fully the whole phenomenon. There are many features in British society which indicate a relationship with old Rome; and among these features this fondness for sport is not the least prominent. When British boxing-matches and prize-fights are duly numbered, we have the old Roman circus

complete in a national shape. The Spanish bull-fights are another national shape of the same thing; and it would be very unbecoming in a Briton or a Spaniard to call the amusements of the Roman circus barbarous, despite its somewhat more barbarous proceedings, in some instances. Civilisation has advanced a little, there is no denying it.

The Romans pleaded that their 'circences' were a war-like exercise, and a preparation for war. So do the Spaniards with their bull-fights, and so do the Britons with boxing and hunting. It should, however, be remembered that the Mamelukes, though the best riders in the world, were useless against the French squares. Boxing, however, can, as suggested by a respectable periodical, be a safeguard against 'garotting.' On the whole, all these amusements and pastimes only keep alive a kind of ferocity which may be very useful in times of real war. In a civilised age people might really grow too sentimental; but I think the same ends could be attained if each one became his own butcher. Butchers, however, put their victims to death without greater agony than necessary. It is therefore perhaps just as well that these 'noble British arts' should still continue to be regarded as amusements and eligible pursuits.—I am, &c.

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## LETTER V.

EDINBURGH, 16th March 1863.

SIR,—It is a dangerous undertaking to write about foreign countries, for this reason, that there is much in them that we do not understand. The constitution of the society in which we have been born and brought up, has so thoroughly moulded our judgment and our opinions, that it is very

difficult to understand or appreciate any other state of things. Our judgment somewhat resembles our nostrils; when brought in contact with another atmosphere, we sniff uncomfortably, and ask what in the world it means.

It is a truism to say, 'that every one sees the world from a point of view peculiarly his own.' So far, it is all very well. But the application is somewhat more difficult. A man, admitting his particular point of view, does *not* suspend, as he ought to do, for this very reason, his opinion of others. On the contrary, he confidently sits in judgment upon them, believing that truth is with him and with no one else. 'Whatever is right' said Pope, and Hegel reduces the comfortable maxim to a philosophical system. I have good reason, therefore, when I am writing about Britain, to entertain a mistrust of myself. Strange to say, I have found England not only different from our own country, but also from every other country of the Continent with which I have any acquaintance. The social fabric, the popular feeling, the literary strain, have all made an impression on me, like what I might be supposed to feel if I had alighted on another planet; and the more I have investigated the social body, the literature, and the customs of the nation, the more has my embarrassment increased. I have sometimes purposely set aside the geographical fact, that Britain is an island, and have arrived at the same conclusions by inductions from the national life. May the British Channel and the North Sea never dry up, and make England part of the Continent; and may England, as before, keep aloof from the current of Continental taste and feeling! This state of things not only furthers progress, but what is equally valuable, it amuses. If I may argue from myself, it is impossible for a man from the Continent to remain any time on English ground in low

spirits. You cannot set your foot on the streets without seeing or hearing something to tickle you immensely. I suppose that Englishmen, *vice versa*, have their own delights when on the Continent. The differences are a perpetual source of mutual amusement, which it would be narrow-minded to wish dried up. But it is even more than instruction and amusement. It promotes peace. We always respect and entertain a certain awe for what we do not understand. It has, moreover, been remarked, that people who are of the same cast of mind, are most apt to quarrel. It is, I would venture to hint, for this very reason, that the English and the Yankees fall out so bitterly; and further, that the Yankees themselves are exhibiting to the world such a spectacle of social discord. Slavery and democracy may have a share in causing the confusion, but the deep cause is the irritating sameness of temper, which would soon dry up the Yankee mind, if their vast territory were not broken up into different independent States, according to climate and the natural branches of industry. People will form themselves into independent nationalities, when they find that they have peculiar resources of their own to develop, and the breaking up of the world into such nationalities is no mere freak, but a principle deeply rooted in human nature. It is indeed self-preservation.

We have often heard it alleged, that steam, telegraph, and free trade, re-acting upon this tendency of people to dis-unite and form into new bodies, will produce conformity and even peace. It may be; but as yet we have seen very little of such effects. Perhaps, however, there is in store for Europe a Chinese civilisation, with cramped feet and other such adjuncts. On this I can say nothing. I only say, that we are not Chinese as yet, in spite of some tendencies to that state of things. But to return from this digression

to the differences I have found between the social state in England and that at home, and in other countries of Europe, I may remark, that these discrepancies originate in the difference of the social fabric, which is the foundation-stone of politics, the moulder of literature, of public feeling, of taste, and oftentimes even of morals. We may talk as we please of common principles, and of the universality of certain rules. History demonstrates, that nations have always squared their moral code by their special necessities of life, or by their social position. It is curious that Macaulay overlooked this fact, when he made Machiavelli, correctly enough, an exponent of the Italian state of things, embodying, as it were, principles growing out of the social constitution of Italy at that time. Enervated, divided, and oppressed, Italy took to deceit. So does the fox; the bear does not need it, he relies on his strength. The morality is the same, its form only being changed. We see it is thus in the East, and among oppressed nations generally. Russia is an absolute monarchy, tempered by assassinations, as Talleyrand remarked. It was thus in Imperial Rome, and thus it must be everywhere in a similar state of things. Men must live, and where there is no redress by legal means, then the alternative is a resort to deceit or violence; and public feeling will generally approve of such measures, as a suitable, or rather the only possible proceeding in such a state of society. Machiavelli, therefore, is no exception, but a splendid illustration of a common rule.

If we inspect the moral code of modern powers, we will find that their decisions are always adapted to what they most urgently stand in need of. Every impartial reader of history will, at a glance, see this. Spirited France must wage wars for 'ideas,' and more practical England must

have commercial relations with China and Japan. Germany feels the want of harbours in the Baltic, and foment moral indignations on that account. Austria and Russia want to exist, and they crush nationalities. Most criminal codes make allowances for emergencies within certain limits. A man is not punished for stealing to satisfy extreme hunger, or for murder in compulsory self-defence. The ultimate principles of right are, therefore, thus reduced to those of necessity, even by the laws themselves.

Even in the different walks of life we see morality adapted to the necessities of a special calling. There are, for example, 'commercial morals,' 'diplomatic morals,' 'horse-dealing morals,' and here, in sporting England, you may even hear of 'turf morals,' and in Italy, I have no doubt, they have 'brigand morals.' People must do their best to thrive, and they consequently make up a code of morals and customs within the limits of their special businesses; and it would be unfair in a man of another pursuit to measure others by the standard of his own morality. People are shrewd. Feeling that the whole Ten Commandments are rather too many for a single person, they select for themselves some which they can to a certain degree pretty punctually observe; and directing their whole efforts to the observance of these few points they sit in severe judgment upon others who would make for themselves a different selection.

Some divines in Scotland, for example, have an idea that the most important command in the decalogue is the fourth, and insist upon its being observed in preference to all the others. Cab-driving, walking, relaxation of any kind on the 'Lord's day,' is, they say, enough to bring a curse upon a nation. They thus adapt their code to their vocation. The first day of the week is their day of busi-

ness. They want to have well filled churches, and increased incomes. Hence, to keep holy the Sabbath day is, in their view, a matter of paramount importance. The merchant looks at the matter from a very different stand-point. He is closely confined to his counting-room for six days, and he cannot see much wrong in taking a walk or a drive to himself on a day, part at least of the obligation of which he complies with, by the fact of doing no business ; and the other part, that namely of attending church, he is inclined to regard as a clerical artifice adapted for commercial purposes. Which is in the right, the minister or the merchant? The former has no difficulty in observing the Fourth Commandment. 'Tis his vocation—he makes money by it—while the latter may find a real difficulty in observing the law of justice. This much is apparent, both minister and merchant have a great many strong motives for mutual toleration and forbearance.

The point I would gain by this exposition, is to induce you to credit me with the will, at all events, to act fairly by the British people when noticing their peculiarities. I make no pretensions to the character of a reformer. Such a mission I leave to more obstinate natures. I make, however, every allowance for national eccentricities ; and whatever anomalies I may point out, are referred to for your information, not to gratify any unworthy feeling on my part towards the truly good people among whom I at present reside.

When treating of a nation the work must be done delicately, because, comparatively speaking, it is immortal. Men die, and their sins are buried with their remains ; the good they may have happened to do lives after them. It is not so with nations. A national sin is a mark of Cain, so to speak, for an earthly eternity ; and it is for this rea-

son, I think, that nations are so jealous of their virtues. It may, however, also be personal vanity multiplied by millions. History shews that this national vanity increases just in proportion with the numbers of a nation. There is a braggart spirit in large nations which might be amusing were it not grotesque. Smaller communities cannot indulge in it, because they feel at once their insignificance in the world. They thus make up by common sense what they want in power. We Norsemen, you know, sometimes forget ourselves so far as positively to boast. Of course, every nation—as most individuals—has something to boast of; but generally the man who has most reason to boast, is silent in that respect. The best we can say of a thing is to call it *Norse*. It is, however, the same in every country. To call a thing *English*, is the most that can be said of it here in England. To call a thing *French*, in France, is to secure for it a ‘succé pyramidal.’ The Germans become downright frantic when they hear of anything ‘Deutch.’

There exists in most nations a half-mystical, half-poetical kind of being, who acts as the impersonation and representative of national swagger. Shakespeare’s Falstaff, and Holberg’s Jacob von Tybo, are examples of this sort of character. There are also certain figurative individuals, to whom is assigned the province of embodying and setting forth a nation’s characteristics. Thus, the Danes have their *Sörensen*; the Germans their *Müller* and *Schulze*; the French their *Prudhomme*; the English their *John Bull*; and the Yankees their *Jonathan*. Such figures are the result of an attempt to individualise a people, and as they have been generally accepted as exponents of a nation’s peculiarities, they have as such something of a value attached to them. There can be no doubt but that

it is an impulse of nature for every one to think highly of what is his own. Love of country is an element in the moral constitution of man, the absence of which would seriously compromise his contentment with his lot. There is, however, a danger of this pure feeling becoming corrupted, and degenerating into an odious national vanity, more especially if the object of our affections be possessed of the charms of vast power and unlimited resources. The fulsome length to which this passion can be carried, has been excellently well exemplified by the American republic. Her statesmen, her orators, and her press, uttered some of the loftiest bombast which the world has perhaps ever listened to; and even now, in the hour of his agony, and with the death-rattle in his throat, we can still hear Jonathan mumbling over themes that were the delight of his healthy manhood. It may be the delirium of the death-struggle that prompts him; if so, the ruling passion is still strong in death.

Boasting and swagger are not, however, confined to the American continent; and had Shakespeare's lot been cast on the present times, he would have found ample materials among his countrymen for augmenting and improving his Falstaff. John Bull is really very little behind his relation Jonathan in national conceit. He is full of it, and in consequence talks oftentimes very foolishly. Take up at random a copy of the *Times*, and you will find there abundant proof of this assertion. What people that was not completely blinded with vanity could read or hear and endorse a statement like the following:—'Our society is the most civilised that ever existed.' God knows, there are many things in English society very far from warranting such a boast. But Macaulay, of all men, has served up to national vanity the grandest dishes that ever were pre-

pared by the genius of a *chef*. Even Le, however, has erred, and disgusted the palate and taste of at least one political section of the British people, by his unsavoury whig garnishings. But if the error gained him a baronetcy, it was no great error after all.

It is gravely stated by Victor Hugo, that Louis Philippe was deposed because he was not a suitable mouth-piece for the vanity of the people he undertook to govern. This perhaps, will prove the rock on which the Napoleon dynasty will split; for Napoleon is certainly, as far as we have yet seen, no braggart. But nations are so like petted children, that to govern them well, you must necessarily coax them.—I am, &c.

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## LETTER VI.

“*Leges agrariae sunt instar omnium.*”

—*Corpus Juris Romanum.*

EDINBURGH, 23d March 1863.

SIR,—So far as my memory serves me, the above quotation is verbally correct—that it conveys the true meaning of the passage referred to, I entertain no doubt. Thirteen centuries have elapsed since Justinian ordered the compilation of the code which bears his name, and the experience of that long length of time has fully corroborated the fact, that agrarian laws have a greater share in moulding the features of society, than all the other laws put together. The soil is the great source whence life is supplied, and round it, commerce, manufactures, and all other pursuits revolve, as planets round the sun. It becomes then an important question, when examining the constitution of a community, to inquire into the modes of tenure by which the soil is

held, for the soil is after all the real mode of life, against which all other modes struggle in vain.

There is, therefore, an instinct in every people to possess land, and in Britain, where old feudal splendour is better preserved than in any other European country, except perhaps some parts of Austria, this instinct shews itself wonderfully developed. Even Shakespeare and Walter Scott felt that their literary fame and wealth were worthless, unless they became landed proprietors. Shakespeare died before he could fully enjoy his aristocratic position, and Walter Scott's aristocratic tendencies proved on other grounds failures likewise. When once you are possessed of an estate, it is, of course, always felt to be too small. The prosperity of the money-making classes in Britain tends, therefore, to make the already large estates still larger. And it is a fact, that they are more and more, every year, absorbing the small freeholds. I observe that the soil of England in 1786 was owned by 250,000 corporations and proprietors. In 1822, only by 32,000. And as the greatest prosperity in Britain has been since this date, it is natural to infer that the same process has been going on. I have not seen statistics to adduce in support of this inference, but from all I have learned I think it is correct. Individuals who make fortunes in India, or the nabobs whom Macaulay has likened to Verres, are still in one shape or another coming home and purchasing estates. An opium-trader has just returned home and purchased a whole island on the Scottish western coast. This is a single instance out of many. Brokers, tradesmen, and cotton lords, invest their money when they can in landed property, and then set about angling for titles, which, with the possession of land, become absolute necessities. Thus their sons or grand-

sons, in the run of time, when the smoke of successful speculation and money-making has blown away, are admitted among the real nobility. They buy what they can of the old freeholds, and old aristocratic estates, whose owners have become bankrupt, or where the old chain of succession is broken. Aristocrats who have money to spare do the same. It is even imposed as a condition upon some large estates to expend the surplus funds in buying new estates, and adding them to the original ones. It is the principle of rolling a snow-ball. The Roman *latifundia* are repeating the same cause, and will probably produce the same effect. The process is irresistible, and even if the feudal primogeniture and entail were altered, capitalists would, at least for a while, take matters in their own hands.

After the conquest, when Britain was divided into baronies, the barons and the knights were in the usual feudal manner not made owners of the soil in the modern sense of proprietors, but simply lord-lieutenants of certain districts, with a right to a stated income. It was a subordinate right, applicable only to the counties, and of the same nature as that of the king to the whole country. The right to the ground was divided between the tenants and the barons, or the other persons or corporations who occupied the place of the barons. In Norway, this baronial right never was imposed upon the tenants of the soil, who for that reason were said to hold their *odel*, (nobility.) But we see this same right in the old ecclesiastical and royal domains, which, by donations or forfeitures, passed into a condition resembling the common European fiefs. This original right is still kept in view by both Norway and Denmark, where it must be bought up as *festeafløsning*. The nature of the right I speak of shews itself best in the fact,

that tenants occupied the farms for their lives, and their children after them, as sole proprietors. The rent could not be raised except by the law of the land, and where such a law was wanting, ancient usages held their sway. The rent had much of the same character as modern taxation. But the more these old barons became by the altered social state of things unnecessary, the more they assumed the title of real proprietors. They did this, bit by bit, just as they found they could dispense with the services of the boors in their baronial wars and feuds. And so we come to lay our hand upon one of these great historical abuses which from being time-honoured, will require an Alexander's sword to cut the Gordian knot, whenever the consequences become unbearable. Concessions and negotiations are quite impracticable; the knot has run so tight that it is impossible to untie it, and mankind must undo it for themselves, in one way or another. Nations who have not the power to loosen such knots, are historically dead. The Egyptians, the Indians, the Chinese, not to mention the Greeks and the Romans, perished in this manner. Modern nations seem, however, to be possessed of a good deal of regenerating power; but modern history has advanced so little, that it is altogether premature to form the slightest opinion of the ultimate results of the phenomena we see at work around us. We cannot lift up and scrutinise the weighty questions of the age in which we live. The very fact that we ourselves form part and parcel of the society we would investigate forbids it, and renders all our attempts futile. I remember once seeing a boy step into a pail and try to lift it. He only trampled out the bottom.

When the barons assumed to themselves the title of proprietors of the soil, one of the first proofs of their en-

croachment was to root out the original boors. In some places they cut off the succession from father to son ; in others they limited the leases. Then were the boors at their mercy. Leases were shortened to 30, 20, 19, 15, 9, and even 1 year. In most parts of England this decreasing scale has arrived at its last stage ; whereas, in Scotland it has not as yet fallen generally below 19 or 9 years. The proprietors are, however, perfectly willing to follow the glorious example of England, in order to get the farmers wholly into their power. But in the better parts of Scotland there is something like a returning shadow of the farmer's right. Some of these are wealthy and enlightened, therefore somewhat independent. They resist the further curtailment of leases. But their resistance must in the end give way, the odds against them are too heavy. The game must be played out, and the person who would attempt to stop it, would meet the madman's fate, who would thrust his limbs into the wheels of an express train, with the wild idea of bringing it to a stand. It was something very significant, that the managers of the Duchy of the Prince of Wales, in their report to Parliament, assigned as a reason for the increase of its revenues, that the length of the leases had been considerably curtailed. Of course, the revenues of the Duke were augmented by the proceeding ; but the managers seemed not to be aware of the destructive engine they had brought to bear upon the people of the Duchy by such a measure. The revenues of all the petty kings among whom the soil of Britain is divided, are increased to a fabulous extent, by the self-same artifice. Curious, however, to say, I have heard it asserted that such a policy increases also the income of the farmers. Short leases, and rents rising yearly higher and higher, are advantageous alike to proprietors and tenants. This is truly a brilliant discovery in

economical science. It must in the long run do away with all poverty. I tried to find some rational interpretation for the saying, by ascribing it to the improved modes of agriculture, and to the prosperity of the manufacturing communities. I, however, failed to satisfy myself. A farmer, however, whom I encountered, solved the problem for me in this way—I make, said he, retrenchment in every possible way, without injuring the modes of husbandry. At last I found that my children could go bare-footed nearly all the year round. I have six children, and save yearly on an average ten shillings a head for shoes. I just make up the increased rent of my farm. Upon my questioning if he did not by this injure the health of his children, he gave me the answer such people all over the world are in the habit of giving—‘If a child die it is a blessing for it.’ Now, suppose a proprietor to have a thousand such tenants, he will have an annual increase of £3000 a-year, which he can spend in high life in London, or in tours of pleasure all over Europe.

Another farmer told me that he had met his increased rental by retrenching the herring which his work-people were in the habit of getting on stated days, and this came to something considerable in the year. Even the Russian serfs get a herring, but it is impossible it seems in Britain. On one of the largest farms in East Lothian, the food of the labourers consists of porridge and water and milk, morning and evening, with bread and a bottle of beer for dinner. Butcher meat and butter are out of the question. The ploughmen, generally speaking, keep a pig, so they and their children can get a bit of flesh meat at least some few times in the year. In the cities and manufacturing districts, the common people live better, notwithstanding the many unheard of miseries endured in these crowded places.

It must surely be here that the British workmen get the substantial food about which I have heard so much vaunting. In the rural districts, it certainly is not—at all events, very little is there got from the animal kingdom. Therefore it is that people go to the cities, or emigrate, and it is a fact that the rural population in Britain is on the decrease. It must necessarily be so. A man with some enterprise and education, will not submit to such a state of things. The rural population must also of necessity deteriorate, and it is also a fact, that the native English and Scottish workmen in the rural districts are more and more superseded by Irishmen. These are yearly filling up more and more the lower branches of work, and by their steadily increasing numbers, their different nationality, and their different religious confession, are slowly but irresistibly preparing a change, which will one day revolutionise British society. It is all very well to expatiate on the law of supply and demand, to raise the rents, and see a few farmers tolerably welloff during the transitory state of things. A social change is in preparation, whether for better or for worse it is vain to conjecture. One thing is clear, it is a very interesting social problem which Britain has undertaken to solve. Let us hope it may be for the benefit of mankind. The thorough root and branch work which is carried on with the old rural life, and the conversion of it into manufacturing channels, are things entirely new in history. The Roman *latifundia* with which this British state of things can alone be compared, had less of the manufacturing element, they had slaves, and at a later period their *glebas adscripti*. Could we predict the social result of the overgrown cities and manufacturing establishments of modern times, the future of the rural population would be more easily foreshadowed. But this is one of the unknown quantities in the equation,

which time must solve. Once in possession of its value the worth of the other is of easy deduction.

It has been fancifully remarked by some one, that as soon as we pass the meridian of life, we begin to die, just as the sun rises to his noon, and sinks to his setting. Had we eyes penetrating enough to scan and read our inward constitution, we would, it is alleged, see death surging through every vein and artery. Our first wrinkles come and apprise us that these secret workings of death are going forward. Yet, strange to say, we appear to gain strength, and in some respects to feel as well as in the morning of life. But the sun shines, though he be sinking. Dying or decaying we have little or no feeling of the process, till the final struggle arrives, and our mirror may assist in the deception by telling us that we do not yet look old. Even up to a certain point we may feel our intellectual strength increase, for the spirit builds its temple on the body's ruins.

Thus it is with the lives of nations. They neither see nor feel the workings which are going on, and take it ill, as fresh old gentlemen will do, when hints are dropped of advancing age and its concomitant frailties. Far be it from me, when suggesting dangers to Britain from the workings of the agrarian laws, to incur the displeasure of the British people. I have stated my opinions, erroneous and disagreeable they may be, they are honestly entertained withal. Let me, however, say, that as a foreigner anxious to keep within the bounds of caution and moderation, I never would have ventured to give expression to my sentiments on such topics in the strong terms employed by a British writer, in the *Spectator* of November last. The passage is as follows:—‘There is no denying that England presents a sad contrast in some matters, and those most

vital ones, to almost every other country. Nowhere else in Europe are the extremes of wealth and poverty so fearfully apparent. In my four miles' daily walk in London, I see more of the agony of the struggle for mere life; more men, women, and children walking about with the signs of physical misery in their faces, their limbs, their clothing, than in any country I have passed through, not excepting Turkey. I can name a dozen villages within fifty miles of London, most of them the property of great lords and commoners, in which almost every labourer's cottage is far less fit to be the home of men and women, than any wayside hovel which I saw between Calais and Constantinople, with the one single exception of the Tartar huts near Chernavoda.—I am, &c.

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## LETTER VII.

EDINBURGH, *March 30, 1863.*

SIR,—British agriculture, which in many of its phases has been brought to resemble closely a manufacture, yields an immense income. I have, however, found the generally received notions respecting it somewhat exaggerated. In the northern parts of Germany and Denmark, in portions of Sweden, and even in some farms in Norway, the cultivation of the soil is quite as good as in most parts of Britain. In the more fertile districts of Scotland it is much superior. The mild British winter, and the great markets, render a comparison between British agriculture and that of the northern countries on the continent wholly inappropriate, and the ambition of many of these countries to work themselves up to a British standard is neither natural nor practicable.

It is obvious that when capitalists take matters into their own hands, much can be made of the soil by agriculture. But this system is not as yet even in Britain carried through in its integrity. There is yet a wide margin left for the tenantry, and I heard many tenants declare that they would not bestow more care on the cultivation of the soil, because the rent would only be raised if they did so. I was informed by one, that he had been turned out of a farm just after he had spent £500 on improvements, because he had refused to vote at an election as the proprietor wished him to vote. The British are too good calculators to do more than what is absolutely necessary in such a precarious state of things. Neither is it so much for the sake of agriculture as for the acquirement of political influence, that the landlords wish to have the tenantry under their thumbs. The Duke of Somerset, as set forth in the public press, threatened last winter to break the leases of his tenantry if they did not return for Totness a certain Mr Pender, on whose vote the Duke, as a member of the Cabinet, could reckon. The tenantry of course yielded to so persuasive an argument, much after the fashion of the fox in the fable, when the bear, whom he had outwitted, shewed his paws, and asked in a surly mood, 'Am I not right?' 'There can be no doubt about it,' replied Reynard, 'arguments like these are quite irresistible.' It may be useful for you to know that the Duke of Somerset is a leader among the Liberals.

In the instances where capital has given to husbandry all the features of a manufacture, and where the farmers are quite as liberal as their lordly proprietors could wish them, I do not think that the annual yield of the soil is greater than it would have been on independent freeholds. This judgment of mine, in the absence of statistics, can of

course only be guess-work ; but from what my experience of former years leads me to believe, I am inclined to think that I am not far a-field of the truth. Some of the farms I here speak of are too large ; and I should think that the golden mean of having a thing neither too large nor too small, has all its value even when applied to agriculture. Small farms are joined to larger ones, just as small estates are bought up and united. Heavy capital possessed by single individuals, and the rooting from the soil of the old boors, tend naturally to bring on overgrowth, both in estates and in the farms into which these estates are divided. Farms are daily becoming more and more manufactories and commercial establishments, just as the manufactories themselves are absorbed by great capitalists, who take up the old handicrafts of single individuals, and become on an extensive scale tailors, cooks, and shoemakers. Machinery lends its aid to this absorbing principle, even in agriculture. The differences between country and city life are thus becoming more and more obliterated. Capital rises higher and higher, human power sinks lower and lower. The process is a very interesting one, and has moreover been dignified in the present day with the title of civilisation. When this fact is understood, no one will challenge the propriety of the British vaunt that theirs is the most civilised society that ever existed.

To amass individuals, and cast thousands of them into large bodies, will certainly for a time produce great results ; but it is such an outrage on human nature, and so liable to abuses, that it will in all probability prove a failure. Whether such bodies are kept together by military force, or by despotic capital, the final result must be the same. The Egyptians built the pyramids, and the Romans the Colliseum, on this principle. But both of these nations were

in a dying state when engaged on these great achievements. It is mainly on these grounds that the so-called universal monarchies have always proved abortive. When I look upon some of these huge British manufactories, and other such phenomena, I always remember the saying of Professor Hansteen, regarding the great eclipse of 1851. When the minute hand was just on the point of time predicted for the eclipse to begin, his secretary said to him :—‘The time is come, but not the eclipse. Suppose it does not come at all, you and the other astronomers will make a very sorry figure before the world.’ ‘If,’ answered Hansteen, with a sneer, ‘the eclipse does not begin at the appointed time, there will not be a shred of the world left by to-morrow ;’ and as he spoke, a little dark segment was seen creeping on to the sun. The laws of nature were certain. Will theories, the results of which in other nations lie before us in history, fail to produce their natural consequences in Britain ? The laws of nature are generally steadfast, and it would be a hazardous policy to trust to a suspension of these laws for the aversion of a gigantic catastrophe. Too great individualism is, however, also a pernicious obstacle in the way of lasting progress. Extremes meet, says the old adage; and that one extreme paves the way for its opposite, is a saying not quite so old perhaps, yet old enough to be stale. Hence, too large and too small estates pave the way for each other, and both are alike hostile to advancement. In the outskirts of Sweden, and also in Norway, there are estates which struck me as being a great deal too small. The same remark holds good, I am told, in some parts of France. Dreading the consequences, I sighed for large estates, and here in Britain I have got my heart’s content of them. Of such excessive dimensions are they in some instances as to make me repent of my former sighs, and pray

for the small ones back again. Either state of things creates a mob; and it really matters little, when affairs have come to that, whether a portion of that mob be attired as lackeys and grooms, or not. If such beings can at times boast of a superiorly developed intellect, they are on the other hand more servile and cringing than the poor man on his croft, who in times of great emergencies turns out a better soldier, with something valuable to fight for. Owning a part, however small a portion of the soil he may own, he is a nobleman, compared with the day-labourer, the lackey, or even the tenant-farmer on short leases. I have, moreover, as I said, seen the smallest freeholders turn the acre to quite as good an account as the tenants on large farms; the patches round the houses are in most cases cultivated like gardens. Ireland cannot be adduced as a proof of the reverse of this, because the Irish labour under the double disadvantage of being at once tenant-farmers and of sitting on crofts. Many sensible Irishmen told me that it would have been sheer folly in them to cultivate their farms better than they did.

One word about Ireland before going farther. When recalling the history of that much-abused country; when hearing from the lips of its inhabitants the many hardships and injustices they have to endure; when I consider that their native nobility has mostly all disappeared, to make place for courtly favouritism opposed to the population both in race and religion; when I peruse the shameless and ill-natured attacks hurled against them by the English press, and read the commentary on all these proceedings in the fact of a landlord or his steward being shot down by a maddened peasantry, I feel for the moment, as I have often felt when listening to that famous trio in "*Lucrezia Borgia*," where, under the sweet melody sung by the hero,

you can hear the abrupt and angry mutterings of the duke and duchess. When you have listened to that wonderful composition, your mind is not at all unprepared for the choral scene with which the tragedy closes. I am no prophet, neither do I pretend to say what may come of these forboding murmurs and revengeful mutterings which ever and anon rise from the sister island, to interrupt the lofty strain of prosperity which Britain is chanting to the world. I only trust that there is existing among the British a regenerating power strong enough to avert a direful and sanguinary catastrophe.

That nobody has power and knowledge, where life is too much levelled, is often pleaded as an excuse for having wide aristocratic forests waving over plebeian underwood. There will, of course, always be something like gradation even in a country where all are formed of the same clay, and nobody is 'born a beggar,' as a characteristic British phrase runs. There will be legitimate heritages of unprivileged property, there will be industrious people and idlers, economy and prodigality, to make all fears of an Utopian equality groundless. And if the poorest and most ignorant people should divide their estates too much, the better educated and wealthy class will not do so; they have rather an opposite tendency, and will not even divide their estates sufficiently to ensure better cultivation. Experience teaches us this lesson, in those countries where things can freely develop themselves after their own nature. It might, however, be a wise measure to limit by law the division of estates, if practicable limits could be assigned. In these countries I speak of, the intellectual duties are discharged by the better freeholders and the wealthier classes in every rank of life, but above all by able officials educated at the universities, and appointed in as impartial a way as pos-

sible. The whole body is kept together by a king, with ministers answerable to a parliament, a select court of law, and a free press. Hence the aristocracy in such countries is the aristocracy of intellect and genius. Such a constitution of things would, however, be but ill adapted to the tastes of a people who care little for genius when associated with poverty, and who would give the preference any day to a calf were it only fashioned of gold.

The aristocratic tendencies of which I am accused in Norway have received during my stay here some wonderful impulses. British society is in certain points of view an admirable contrivance. It resembles most a well-drained district of country. Human nature is in general lazy, and few people will work more than they are compelled to. But when society is so framed that one class can legally drain the other, then will that society, like the soil, give a greater annual yield. What would you say to establishing such a society in Norway. It is quite practicable, if our freeholders (odelsmen) would only begin by giving up their property to a few lords, say, a parish to some, and two, three, or even four to others. The freeholders would then become tenant farmers, and would be driven from their leases, and their rents raised just in proportion to their clear profits and better cultivation of the ground. In a word, they would be drained. Then again, on their side, they would drain the ploughmen and the more subordinate work people, down to the dank and fusty populace, who with all these drains acting on them would grow in time as dry as mummies. Children would be drained of their shoes, and field-workers of their herring; drains, in fact, would radiate in all directions. The poor workman would never see, even on holidays, a hare or a rabbit on his table, without being pulled up for a poacher. His bit of fresh

meat would be drained away. There is really something symbolic in the fact that Britain exports drain-tubes. In no country is the drainage so perfect. She is a model for the admirers of the system to study.

Capital in a few hands only creates it in a few. These draining operations impart themselves by the law of coherence to the cities, to commerce, to manufactures, and even to law. We often complain that our little floating capital is not contracted into few enough hands to make it sufficiently effective: it is the want of systematic draining. We often say that our work-people are somewhat stubborn, that they live too well, and work too little: it is the want of this social drainage, I assure you. But I cannot expound this interesting system further here, you must be content with these few hints.

Let me add, in conclusion, that I think we could set a machine of this nature a-going; in all likelihood it would explode, but it might have a good run before that. It depends altogether, as I suggested, upon our freeholders. Perhaps they would more willingly give way when told that a perfect social drainage brings along with it a high civilisation, or maybe they would more willingly yield when assured that 'il n'est que le premier pas qui coute.'—I am, &c.

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## LETTER VIII.

EDINBURGH, *April 6, 1863.*

SIR,—Once you have gained some insight into the agrarian condition of Britain, you are in possession of Ariadne's clue to the social labyrinth, and will, I think, be able, without much effort, to account for the main differences

between British society and the society of the Continent. Living for herself, Britain could, at pleasure, carry out feudal principles to the full, and even if she had not kept aloof from the current of continental thoughts, it is more than probable that they would, down at least to the present day, have glanced harmlessly off from her institutions, just as cannon balls are said to do from the modern iron cupolas. Resting on this broad explanation, it is wholly indifferent where I begin to trace the consequences of these agrarian principles in politics, customs, or in literature. I am keenly alive to the weakness of broad explanations, and shall therefore cling to facts. But facts again must, somehow or other, be explained, since we must always assign a reason for the doings of reasonable beings. It is generally taken for granted that modern nations, for at least the last hundred years, have learned to understand Christianity so far as to consider all people brethren, or, perhaps, more correctly speaking, to consider all men as made of the same clay. Not but what we have made distinctions in the social scale between rich and poor, high and low, but these differences have been regarded as accidental, and not touching man's real worth. It may be that the moral qualities had no share in raising the one or in depressing the other. It has further been a partially received opinion that the Caucasian race is intellectually superior to the negroes; but among people of our own race, we have found no reason whatever for placing nation over nation, or, generally speaking, man over man. In this respect we have had a spiritual house of peers, and just from that circumstance we distance far the Greeks and Romans, who not only made a real distinction between themselves and the barbarians, but also between rulers and subjects, or in other words, between aristocrats

and plebeians, not to mention the slaves. The old nations, we say, perished because they did not understand brotherhood. I am, however, afraid that we, in this as in many other respects, have painted ourselves somewhat whiter than we really are, and that the differences between us and the nations of old are not so great as we boast when facts are more closely examined. I will not take up the comparison between the slaves of the old and those of modern communities in the rural and manufacturing districts, because, in this point, I find real progress. Men are now free, and the fact is a capital one, even should this freedom, in many cases, avail them little. Ransom and the favours of manumission have disappeared. Granting, however, all this, we judge the old nations too severely, and shut our eyes to many modern facts. The proceedings of certain Scottish noblemen against the faithful and brave Highlanders, and the fact that wealthy Britain suffered thousands of Irishmen to die of sheer starvation, are considerations which ought to make us a little indulgent towards the nations of old. Assistance did arrive in the latter case, but the dead could not be awakened. How was relief afforded during what was called the cotton famine of last year? It came late, and when it did come it took in every respect the shape of an alms. A great and wealthy people would surely have acted more wisely had they sooner met the approaching miseries. It is somewhat late to lock the stable door when the horse is stolen. This must not, however, be taken to indicate any want of feeling in the British people. It is the system, and the private subscription, instead of prompt help from a watchful government, that I quarrel with. It is the fact that the government does not choose to put wealthy proprietors and employers in the same relations to the people

they employ, as it does the parishes which are bound to support their own poor. The cotton manufacturers made money by the crisis—it relieved the glutted market ; it would, therefore, have been but just to make them pay. It looks indeed a strange proceeding to save great capitalists who have made money through the very calamity which has thrown their work people into beggary and starvation, and to solicit alms from the day-labourer and the school-boy to meet the exigencies of the dreadful occasion. But it is only another phase of the draining system. Be this as it may, it is ill in place to boast of unmatched benevolence as British papers have been doing. It is, however, of a piece with the flourish of trumpets which we hear when a proprietor, after sucking the marrow out of a district, gives a few coals and potatoes to the poor, builds a chapel, or subscribes a trifle to schools. In a well regulated community, all such things would be legal claims upon property, and nobody would dream of thanking a man for doing his duty. The only advantage the system in vogue here can be said to possess, is that it keeps alive what must be called an undeserved gratitude. Yet are there to be found here respectable lawyers and politicians who sigh for the good old time, when fewer laws and more arbitrary power prevailed—certainly a touching, but happily a somewhat vain longing for childhood. This state of things is, withal, no matter for marvel, it is perfectly natural in a society made up of overwhelming wealth in the midst of abject poverty. When I hear millionaires loudly praised for giving trifles, I cannot help remembering Davus, in Holberg's 'Pluto,' making up his claim to a reward from God. 'I took three purses,' says he, 'it is true ; but when I had done so the purses were mine, and in giving one of them away, I undoubtedly have a purse in my favour on the moral balance-sheet. Heaven must

consequently reward me; there can be no reasonable doubt of it.' I am certainly no socialist, but I have a leaning towards order and responsibility, and had I been director of the press in Britain, I would have taken good heed how I spoke of such benevolencies as those above mentioned. In a man born and brought up in Britain it is otherwise. But let me pass on to the subject I proposed to treat of in this letter.

The highest class writers are usually nothing more than expounders of prevailing national feelings, which they mould into such a shape that they are often mistaken for new. As the ablest men in the community, they, of course, march in the van of intellect; but they do not go further or faster than others can follow, that is to say, they only put in words what is lying latent in the intellect and feelings of others. They are but the lightnings from the charged atmosphere. In some special discoveries, however, we see many men who, to all seeming, distance their time; but poets and moral and philosophical writers cannot be placed in this category, and least of all journalists, who hardly dare to be very much wiser than their readers, even if they could. Men of letters therefore, have always been considered tolerably safe guages of the intellectual strength of their respective nations. I will select some few instances out of the more recent British literature and daily press, that you may see how matters stand in some of the branches most liable to be influenced by the social state of things.

Walter Scott in his 'Marmion' says:—

'No more a lord of rank and birth,  
But mingled with the dregs of earth.'

The hero had lost his rank and estates, and was consequently reduced to 'the dregs of earth.' If Scott by this

wished only to represent bygone feelings, he must have known that by using such an expression, he only made his hero contemptible, instead of tragic. This was not the author's meaning; and Sir Walter was far too good an artist to adopt such an expression if he did not consider it a received truth,—a little exaggerated perhaps, as becomes a poet, but in the main worth the keeping. The whole tenor of Scott's writings, as far as I have noticed, tends to corroborate the supposition that he really expressed his own opinion in this quotation. High birth is to him something religious, and he consequently makes his men of rank much better than others. When a noble family dies out, it is something like the extinction of an animal species, or an idea, and there is much poetical mourning over the event. Pedigrees and heraldry were grave themes for Sir Walter's muse to spread her venturous wing upon, and I really believe he cherished such themes as fondly as if they had been the tenets of an orthodox faith. I regret that I never dreamed of the possibility of such opinions existing among men of letters in modern times, and in consequence, I did not fully appreciate them when I perused the writings of Walter Scott and other British classics. It was only when I studied British society that my eyes were opened, not only to the possibility, but even to the necessity of finding the same thoughts in the literature as in the institutions, the customs, and social sentiments. My quotations must, however, be scanty, and taken merely as hints to a deeper study of this interesting phenomenon in British literature. In older times, we find this idolatry of the nobility in all European nations, and it is no exception to the common feeling of the time when Bishop Fisher (1509) in his sermon over the Countess of Derby, comparing her with the 'blessed Martha,' says:—'She was a

woman of noble blode, to whom by inherytance belonged the castle of Bethany; and this noblenesse of blode they have which descend of noble lynage.' Perhaps, with all due deference to Bishop Fisher, I may suggest that they did not carry matters quite so far in countries where the nobility had less power. For it will generally be found true that this species of idolatry exists in a direct ratio with severity, just as dogs are reverent in proportion to the punishment inflicted upon them. But as a rule, we find these sentiments common all over Europe in the middle ages, and in more modern times we see them prevail proportionately as the social state of things approaches the medieval standard.

The Lord of Burleigh is one of Tennyson's best poems. This lord disguises himself as a landscape painter, and falls in love with Clara, who, of course, is as fond of the landscape painter as he is of her. They get married, and it soon comes to light that he is a mighty lord. But after making this brilliant discovery, Clara is not at all content as you naturally would think. The sentiment is the same as you have often read in some old stories, when enchanted ladies or gentlemen found that they were wedded to supernatural beings, they either die, or are very unhappy. Clara, poor thing, chooses the first. The ladies of old Greece could marry gods, but they were probably aristocratic ladies; and Clara was only a poor village girl. This was a sin against caste which must be expiated, and when she dies, the religious nature of this dreadful transgression is indicated by his dressing her 'in the dress that she was wed in, that her spirit might have rest.' She behaved very well as long as life was possible. 'She grew a noble lady,' and 'shaped her heart to all the duties of her rank.' But

'Faint she grew, and ever fainter.'

And

“ So she droop’d and droop’d before him,  
Fading slowly from his side.”

Still you have a hope that she will recover.

“ But a trouble weigh’d upon her,  
And perplex’d her night and morn,  
With the burthen of an honour  
Unto which she was not born.”

She *was not born to the honour*. There is the deep cause of all the mischief, and it is no burlesque; on the contrary, it is very pathetic. Perhaps a Lacedemonian poet would have written thus about a Helto girl being raised to the rank of a Spartan lady; but a Roman poet would scarcely have considered the elevation of a slave-girl so impossible, at least Horace would have had more liberal views, being himself the son of an emancipated slave. Judging from this, British society and its poet laureate have not advanced much. All is not progress that has been set down as such. Let us, however, remember that it is the Court poet who writes thus. He receives, according to ancient usage, some barrels of wine per annum, and his verse certainly in this instance smacks of the royal cellar.—I am, &c.

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## LETTER IX.

EDINBURGH, April 13, 1863.

SIR,—You will forgive me if you find the subject which I led you to believe concluded in my last letter, continued in the present, and perhaps even extended into the succeeding one. I am anxious that you should believe my exposition of the state of British society honest on my part, and

in itself just. I will accordingly continue my old method of laying quotations before you, upon which my comments shall be brief, and the conclusions as much as possible left to your own deduction.

A deeper study of British literature carries with it a clearer conviction that I was perfectly right in connecting the admired cattle breeding propensities of the British, with their views of human society. My feelings recoiled from using the same expressions for human beings as for cattle and dogs. But I see now that I could have done so without the slightest risk of offending against British taste. 'Low breeding' and 'objectionable breed,' are very common modes of denoting people not belonging to the nobility. The expression is clearly metaphorical, and borrowed from the brute creation. A writer who, in 'Good Words,' puts forth a 'plea for the Queen's English,' and expressly sets about teaching his readers good taste and elegant language, uses the expression, 'persons of low breeding.' Such persons are, he says, much given to corrupt the Queen's English. Very natural, I would say. Persons of inferior education, he remarks, are addicted to the same vice. Every bit as natural, I retort. These persons, according to his own theory, belong to different classes; and certainly 'breed' is one thing and *education* another. A well educated man may often be 'lowly bred,' as was Clara in 'The Lord of Burleigh.' I should inform you that 'Good Words' is a church organ, and that the writer of the above article is himself an ecclesiastic of some dignity and pretensions. You will not, therefore, be shocked if you should hear of him some fine morning adducing texts from scripture to prove the Yankee thesis, that slavery and low breed are divine institutions; and you will remark, that the Yankees again in this instance carry their conclusions further than

the original notions of their British forefathers, or even of their modern British brethren. The effort of Wilberforce in England was something like an attack of French feelings; and above all, the evil was at a distance, whereas the Yankees have the question at home just as the British have their 'low and objectionable breed.' Mr Hannay, a scholar and a man of letters, says :—' If a man wishes to enter into public affairs, the best letter of introduction he can bring with him is *his ancient descent*. We know what his family has been in the past, and as he *inherits the virtues* and the traditions of *his race*, we can form some idea of how he will turn out. *His good conduct is guaranteed by a hundred ancestors*. . . . This is the great difference between the *vulgar* and the *noble seed*.' This gentleman uses 'seed' instead of 'breeding,'—a term quite as refined and characteristic of the British mind as the other. It was usual on the Continent some time ago to talk of 'kingly blood.' But as French thinkers and writers brought the whole of these breeding theories somewhat into suspicion, the revolution practically exploded the whole doctrine of 'royal blood.' Bonaparte and Bernadotte are great stumbling blocks to the believers in this creed. But it is a relief that such men rose on the Continent. In old England, the faith in breed and blood still burns vigorously, despite the lectures read by the British press to continental monarchs as to how they should govern. They sweep their neighbours' door-steps assiduously.

British critics give themselves very little trouble about this creed of birth and breed. The *North British Review* for August last, noticed Mr Hannay indeed only to say that his theories could not 'be accepted in toto.' Mr Hannay was treated with respect, and due deference paid to his theories. Perhaps the *Review* did cherish some

heretical doctrines regarding inborn equalities in mankind. Yet it was not for a moment questioned, as far as I observed, but that 'ancient descent' was the best letter of introduction, and on the whole the safest guarantee for a good public servant. This seems to be a principle admitted on all hands. Family connections are always spoken of as legitimate passports to high offices in the State. To quote, by way of example, one instance out of many. The *Saturday Review* for 3d January last says:—'To get a high military command requires capacity or family connections.' Curious enough, 'capacity' is here placed first; 'rank' usually takes the precedence, then family connection, which is well-nigh the same thing, and after some other excellent qualities of a like nature, comes 'ability,' or 'talent,' or 'learning,' dragging behind as things worth having, when nothing better can be had. I am sure this will sound to you like fable. It is stern reality, however. My proofs are the British press and British society. Could they be stronger? They have been strong enough at all events to drive me from the scepticism I at first entertained respecting such a constitution of affairs; and it is my firm belief, warranted by the facts already set forth, and yet to be adduced, that Mr Hannay's theories could not be contradicted without turning everything upside down—society, government, parliament, and even literature. Like the generality of enthusiasts, the British devotees of birth and race overlook the trite historical fact, that the sons of great men have generally turned out arrant dunces. Alexander is adduced as an exception, but he was, if we may believe his mother, the son of Jupiter Ammon. Somehow or other there must have been something very extraordinary connected with his paternity. Goethe's son was styled '*Sohn der Magd*,' the son of the girl. Certain flowers, such as

roses and carnations, lose their regenerating power when too highly developed, and the family must be kept alive by an artifice. The collateral line of a great man often gives great men to the world. Nature seems worn-out by the effort of producing a really great man in the direct line, and appears to rest, in order to recover from her exhaustion. Fireworks drop their rainbow hues when bursting; then all is dark till a new rocket explodes. The illustration is a truthful enough type of the history of nations. When, therefore, things are so, it is not to be wondered at if the British be jealous of their pedigrees, and harp everlastingly on the theme of 'good family,' which does not, as you may infer, mean honest in a moral sense of the word, but signifies first of all 'good breed,' and when this can not be had, wealth. A certain Major Yelverton was last autumn the lion of his day. He had contracted a kind of clandestine marriage with one lady, and a public one with another. Many things were written about him, which were not always to his credit, but the unkindest cut of all was, that the 'respectability of his family' had been called in question. This error called for instantaneous correction. 'His breeding' was unobjectionable, whatever he might be. Consequently a fair and noble lady came forward in the *Cornish Telegraph* with the following statement, which I give you in full, as a fair specimen of the sentiments that prevail in British fashionable life. It was reprinted at the time into many of the British papers, and failed to awake a single smile. It was quite a matter of course. It runs thus:—'Sir,—You have given full prominence to this case, and you will, no doubt, allow me space to correct some errors in your last week's paper. You there say that the Hon. Major Yelverton's *great grandfather kept a butcher's stall* in the town of Newcastle, county Limerick,

and that *his grandfather married his cook*. A reference to the *peerage* will shew both of these statements to be erroneous. The Yelvertons have occupied a *good position* in society from a very *distant* period.' (Here follows a long genealogy, interesting matter, no doubt, to British readers, but I do not think you will care very much about it.) 'I should not have troubled you with these particulars, did I not think it unfair that the press should take advantage of this unfortunate opportunity to circulate all sorts of *ill-natured* and untrue reports.' To hint at such thing as that the Hon. Major Yelverton's great grandfather *had kept a butcher's stall*, or that his grandfather *had married his cook*, is a crime calling for expiation here. We Norsemen go to the opposite extreme, and consider it an honour if a great man has no higher origin than an industrious butcher; and if his mother should have been a cook, we regard her as a really great cook indeed.

To be a 'gentleman by birth' is another common expression for 'good and unobjectionable breeding.' I once asked a breeder of pointers, who on that account passed as a really great man, if the dogs he bred were born with the great virtues they got credit for. 'Of course they are,' said he. 'Then they will be gentlemen by birth, I suppose?' He did not answer, but I heard him mutter something that sounded very unlike a compliment to me.

The British place this question of *blood, birth, and family* quite on a religious footing. The Egyptians and Indians and most of the old nations did the same. In the middle ages we discern the same sentiments. How, without imposing a religious awe upon the poor people, could such theories ever hold their ground to this hour of history? The artificial nature of things would burst like a bomb-shell, and real merit rise to its proper position. The

tenantry look upon the son of their proprietor as they would on the heir to a throne, which in a certain sense he is. They see in this scion of a 'noble stock,' little less than one anointed. They light bonfires on the hills when he returns from parliament or foreign travel. They unyoke the horses from his carriage, and put themselves in their place, on his wedding day, and the newspapers of the district duly record such feats. This is really so touching, that to laugh at it would be cruel. It is the middle ages blooming in full flower and healthy luxuriance in the nineteenth century. They may be the last roses of that stock, and it were sad, only for the sake of antiquarian science, to see their leaves scattered, however kindly, o'er the bed

'Where their mates of the garden lie scentless and dead.'

Such a state of things is perfectly idyllic, and one could wish it preserved in spirits. This is, however, unnecessary. The British are far too conceited to learn a lesson from any foreign land. My grandson, should I have any, will surely experience the same pleasure as I have had, and will, should he come to Britain some fifty years hence, witness a state of society which even I had considered extinct. How often at our meetings have we not wished ourselves among people who really believed in the difference of blood, birth, and race! We envied the choice pleasure the gods enjoyed on Olympus, where, as Lucian tells it, they drank nectar and told amusing stories of human follies; and when their store was exhausted, a frolicsome god was sent down to earth in order to set up some new laughing-stock. They were mischievous gods, for they even laughed at the doings of Ares. We were annoyed, it is true, with the progress of thought which was beginning to develop itself

even among the Russian serfs. These it seems, seek not only freedom, but the possession of land. We had no reason to be afraid. It will take a goodly time before the British farmer advances to this stage, although the legal and historical grounds for his doing so are exactly the same as the serfs. But he finds it quite proper to be prohibited from carrying a loaded gun on his short-leased farm. Shooting is a recreation reserved for gentlemen by birth. Here, however, rises a question which you can ponder over at your leisure—can the British sympathise with the movement among the serfs of Russia, without implicitly calling for a Gracchus at home? There is, however, another, and I am sorry to say a tragic phase to this curious question. I saw a gentleman by birth treating his underling as I would have been ashamed to treat a dog; and the poor creature rebelled not, but licked the chastising hand and skulked away. Such a gentleman may have been well educated and kind-hearted enough; but it is the system and the creed originating in this system that is to be blamed. In gentlemen of this belief, you can read their fancied superiority in their very demeanour. A glance at their busts and paintings in a British gallery will convince you of this. Such appearances are called lofty bearings. Speaking one day with one of those highly superior gentlemen about table d'hôtes, he told me that such things were good enough on the Continent, but in Britain they were impossible. 'Why?' I asked. 'Why!' exclaimed he, with a shudder, and a thrill of real horror, 'do you think I would risk dining alongside of my tailor?' I saw at once the religious conception of the situation, and bent my head acquiescingly—'Quite true, such a neighbourhood *would* be contaminating.'

With such theories as these at work, it is but natural

to find the different classes in British society boxed off from each other, in the same way as drinking parties are accommodated in a tavern. The exertions of wealthy merchants to be elected Lord Mayors in England, and Lord Provosts in Scotland, are pardonable anxieties on the part of these individuals to slide for a while into a more genteel box. They often spend large fortunes in their efforts to rise to these dignities. Say the same of elections to parliament, and even to seats in insignificant town councils. Parliament has many a time and oft done a little to abolish bribery at elections; but bribery is a great pillar in the social edifice, which cannot well be taken out without endangering the entire state of things. It would be something like attempting to remove the rubbish and loose stones from an old building. You do it at the peril of being crushed under the falling fabric. It is a comfort for Britain, and for the world at large, that such rubbish and loose stones will not be so easily removed.

On certain public occasions their social boxes are broken down, when gentlemen for political purposes bend from their high estate condescendingly, after the manner of the Roman patricians when they went among the plebeians *prensando*. The British plebeians are then made happy with money and liquor and promises. They are of a practical turn, and make as much as possible out of their suffrage. I have been much amused at some elections I have witnessed, and I would certainly vote against reforming the suffrage. It is beneficial to both parties as it stands; and as long as the British hold to their theories of breed, a reformed suffrage would only engender confusion, and eliminate from elections their comical element. The British system of election has more real fun in it than that of France, which the English press is in the habit of turning

to ridicule. The British are in the habit of considering themselves, in the matter of votes, the freest people under the sun; and to enhance the matter fully, the world at large is much of the same opinion. I am too fond of harmless mirth to undeceive any living soul believing in this assertion. It is of use to the nations of Europe that the English press should read them a lecture now and then on political principles, and the world has more to gain than to lose by setting up England as her model in politics.

In case you might think, as most readers on the continent would be inclined to do, these underlings of British society discontented with their lot, and sighing for change, I will set down here for your perusal a passage from H. H. Wilson's book on India. You can make the application to Britain yourself. The cases are parallel. At page 107 of his work, Mr Wilson says, 'It is a great mistake to imagine that caste in India is either a burden or a disgrace. The notion is European, springing like many others out of the belief that our own customs and feelings furnish an infallible standard by which to measure those of other nations.' Nevertheless some groans are heard, not exactly about blood and birth, but about the customs which in such a society must be very tight. I remember reading in the *Spectator*,

'Forgive me if I feel oppressed  
By custom, lord of all and me.'

I am, &c.

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### LETTER X.

EDINBURGH, April 20, 1863.

SIR,—I read in the *Dublin Mail* some months ago the

naïve avowal, that 'among the gentlemen of the press are some who are entitled to respect from their *birth* and education.' And the American correspondent of the *Times*, speaking of General Butler, says: 'He has no *family pride*, no honour to uphold; *he is of the populace*.' I could fill a letter, and it would be my longest, with quotations from the British press, of the same scope and tendency. It looks, indeed, as if birth and rank were preferable far to education, genius, or morals. To be ennobled, or have a title conferred upon you, is therefore the greatest honour that can be looked for by man here below. Last winter, some wealthy merchants were created baronets, and the whole press applauded this act of the crown. It was an honour bestowed not only upon the individuals themselves, but upon the whole commercial community, and shed a lustre upon British freedom. Some members of the Scottish press, however, complained that the same honour had not also been extended to men of letters like Mr Chambers, whose writings have for long been as household words in Scotland, and throughout the whole British empire. The nobility of genius, it would seem, is nothing when not acknowledged by parchment documents from the throne. Being ourselves without nobility in this feudal sense of the word, we certainly are not prepossessed either in its favour or otherwise. If we lean at all, it is towards it. French and German poets and philosophers were at one time in the habit of ascribing every vice to patricians, and every virtue to plebeians. It was necessary for them to be thus one-sided, if they would carry through the social and political revolutions they had in view; but it was certainly unjust, and the only justification it can receive is from the common historical practise of compounding for old crimes by committing new ones, and visit-

ing on children the sins of their forefathers. It would be cruel in itself, and destructive to society, to treat a well-educated and good-natured gentleman as if he were his barbarous and ferocious ancestor. He may require to be brought to reason and taught many things not quite gratifying to his pride and self-esteem. But as such persons can, on the one hand, seldom be brought to see their true position, and as revolutionists, on the other, are fully as obstinate in their way, the usual issue of the drama is that the curtain falls on a battle-field. An illustration of such results is supplied by our Northern mythology. Our old god Thor kills in a dishonourable manner the Jothuns. Melancholy and downcast, he sits leaning on his hammer, and brooding over the slain. The prophetess Vola rises in the mist of blood, and foretells revenge. Suddenly the enemies of the gods in Valhall are seen to approach by the light of flaming torches. Heimdal on the rainbow sounds his bugle, and in the battle which ensues, Thor is bitten by the midgardsorm (the snake circling the globe). This was the history of gods, and, as far as we have hitherto seen, it is likewise the history of men.

In my tour through the Highlands, I read in an Inverness paper the following passage upon the death of a nobleman's son :—' Every one who can bestow reverence upon an exalted position in life, must sympathise ; ' with a great deal more in a similar strain. As I was at that time a stranger to British feeling, I was naturally curious to learn what kind of exalted position a man could occupy to claim greater compassion in his sorrows than the rest of mankind. I found, therefore, on inquiry, that the bereaved individual in question was a landed proprietor, and lived in a castle which towered unusually high above the surrounding huts. He was only a landlord,—a good one, it

may be. I shall suppose him such ; and only add, that the writings of this Inverness man of letters threw upon British society a light perfectly new to me. That a tenantry should bestow reverence upon an elevated position of this kind is quite natural, but that a public writer should offer such incense took me at that time by surprise.

My friend the German painter I spoke of in a former letter, told me that a wealthy manufacturer to whom he had letters of introduction gave him the curious piece of advice, that during his stay in Britain he was to assume a haughty mien, and never speak to low people unless in a commanding or proudly condescending tone. We both thought it a strangely constituted society, which imposed upon those who would pass for gentlemen such unkind feelings and barbarous behaviour. The British have as kind hearts as other people, but they are sadly goaded by aristocratic prejudices, and as is usually the case, the upstarts or *homines novi* are the worst. These have yet to substantiate their claim to the title of gentlemen by proper behaviour ; whereas the others are 'gentlemen by birth,' and can consequently now and then be natural and humane without injury to their reputation. The man who has only one coat must be very assiduous in brushing it, but he who has more than one, can afford to dispense with much of this labour. I do not, therefore, judge all British aristocrats by this manufacturing sample.

If you set yourself to look for freedom of thought or of action among the British politicians, I fear your search would prove a fruitless one. Emerson says, 'The hardest radical instantly uncovers and changes his tone to a lord.' He cannot be expected to act differently from public writers. The position of men like Mr Bright and Richard Cottonheart, as the Germans style Cobden, has therefore

always struck me as very ludicrous. They are like the characters one meets with in old comedies and tales, who boastingly assert that they are not afraid of ghosts, but are all the while in a tremble, and praying fervently. But even if such men did not shake, they are, nevertheless, not the men to throw down the gauntlet to old time-worn prejudices. This must be done by ruling spirits and master minds, who have tears and laughter at their command. Politicians of the Manchester school may be found useful after the field has been won, when they could be addressed as our forefathers addressed the ravens after they had slain their enemies—'Take them, now, they are yours.' It is well, however, that such master-minds are not likely to appear soon in Britain, for if we judge them by their works in France and Germany, they are apparently destructive until a new and more advanced state of things emerges from chaos.

Men like Thackeray are better calculated to lay these ghosts, and he has attempted it in a way in his 'Book of Snobs.' But it will not do. He seems to love mankind too little to be a reformer. People are seldom converted by their enemies. Even sins have their causes, and these causes we must understand if we would abolish them. Thackeray sneers at the snobs, and seems not to see that many of them are very charming individuals, who endure much suffering from the yoke of prejudice. A good and true man would sympathise with them. Thackeray, however, not only lacks sympathy, but really lays claim in his own person to a goodly share of the very prejudices he rails at, if I may judge his sentiments by an article in the *Cornhill* for March 1860, regarding 'student life in Scotland.' The article may not be from his pen, but it appears in the magazine conducted by him. I shall cite some passages—

they are all characteristic. 'Just in proportion as education has been valued and rendered accessible to all classes, no matter how poor, the student life has lost its finer qualities.' 'Poverty has stript the student life in Scotland of the social life which ought to accompany it.' He would introduce into Scottish Universities the English system of making all the students live together like soldiers in barracks. In Scotland they are striving to reform their universities on these English patterns taken from the middle ages. A reason for this may perhaps be, that the wealthier classes are in the habit of sending their sons to these seats of learning in England, which are supposed to foster and instil opinions more in accordance with aristocratic tastes and feelings. Into these places no poor student can enter. A Scottish farmer, then, who can afford to keep a pack of hounds for his son, sends him to Cambridge or Oxford, and this, it is thought, would be prevented were the Scottish Universities reformed on these English models. The *Cornhill* continues:—'If it is possible to cultivate letters on a little oatmeal, it is not possible to cultivate society on such attenuated resources.' 'These men ought never to have dreamt of the university; theirs is a false ambition, and it would have been better if they had never left the plough or the smithy; if they had gone into the grocery line, or had taken kindly to confectionery.' He would establish a monopoly of education. 'One of the twenty-two pounders'—(he scoffs at poor scholars, comparing them to cannon; some fine morning they may prove themselves so)—'one of the twenty-two pounders was a very humble individual (he had every reason to be so), but he fought like a hero.' (He was just of the sort that generally do so.) 'Why did he not remain in the butcher's shop? It would have been better for

him to have slaughtered oxen, sold mutton chops, and ridden the little pony all his life, than die in the *vain endeavour to take the position of a gentleman.* But 'are we not to admire the man wrestling with the waves, because *he has no business to be in the water?*' University education is within reach of all classes. This is what displeases him; the advantages of such a system 'is the poor man's view of the case;' but 'those who are in good circumstances are more impressed with the disadvantages of making a university education too cheap, and alarmed by the influx of the humbler classes, which of itself must tend to lower the tone of society.' It is not necessary to quote more. Such things are written, and yet the writer is not scouted, nay, more, he passes as a more advanced 'liberal.' Mr Thackeray has endorsed these opinions, and by so doing he furnishes us with excellent credentials of his capacity to reform society. But breathe not a word of reform, for the British think their society a paragon for the world. They are not haunted by ideals, and when a writer, by some chance, seems to strike at the very root of a grievance, such, for example, as is portrayed in the renowned farce of Lord Dundreary, then the public press is all anxiety to make it appear that it is no satire on a peculiar class, but on human follies in general. Thus the *Spectator* for 8th November said with reference to Lord Dundreary: 'The middle classes of London applaud Mr Sothern when he shews them that an hereditary legislator may be a fool, though almost every man in the theatre more than half sympathises with a peer, *who keeps all his influence for his relations.*' The British people must be an easy people to govern, and must have been well broken in before they could acquiesce in such principles. 'We are not ridden either by priests or aristocrats,' said an English school-

master to me. Although I saw the poor fellow's sides fearfully lacerated by the spurs of both these jockeys, I bowed and said, 'No, you are, as you have very often told the world, the freest people under the sun.' The credulous soul filled up a fresh glass of wine to drink to the speedy downfall of all jockeys. It would really be a shame to disturb the idyllic life of these happy people by preaching freedom of thought to them. They could not understand it, and it would only ruffle their temper. You might make them Yankees who have been British without riders on their backs, and we see the result.

Men of letters must, however, in the run of time, bring about a change in the British mind. German literature is now coming into fashion, and British writers are now much more than formerly influenced both by it and other continental literatures. They are, in this respect, more European. From a mere literary point of view, however, this is not always so good, for British literature is never more admirable than when exclusively British. But the British mind, and consequently the customs of Britain, are thus drawn into a European current. Many of the sentiments and theories recorded above, must inevitably be ere long wholly at a discount, though as long as the British agrarian laws prevail, we may always expect to find a goodly lot of rooks around and within the feudal castles. The notion of a gentleman, originating, I believe, with George IV. when Prince of Wales, that above all, he ought to be a complete idler, is more and more passing away. It is, of course, as yet, a commonly adopted belief, that idleness in a gentleman, as well as pedigree, are like well-kept wines, waxing more and more generous with age. In consequence of this, the claims of any one to be a gentleman, whose father or grandfather had been a useful man,

are always regarded as pretentious, if not wholly spurious, even should the person himself do nothing else than attend horse-races and fox-hunts, shoot grouse, breed dogs, and dip slightly at his leisure hours into politics. But there are some ominous signs beginning to shew themselves in the literature of the day, seeming to betoken an opinion that a gentleman ought to be something else than a mere idler. There are even complaints in circulation, that the public mind begins to betray a leaning towards 'self-made men.' The rapid intercourse between nations by steam and rail, seconds and strengthens this tendency; and I am half inclined to suspect, that even some of the aristocracy themselves lend the movement their patronage. It was thus that some despots on the Continent acted during the last century. They coquetted with liberalism until liberalism, or rather the revolution, took them at their word. Speeches like some lately pronounced by the Earl of Derby and Lord Palmerston are to my mind extremely dangerous, if the existing state of things is meant to be continued in Britain. The people believe in their aristocracy; and the day may come when they will say: 'You have fed us with fair promises long enough; help us now, if you please, to a few facts.' There would be the spell would conjure up a Gracchus.

But this is still a distant goal, and on the way to it, this British society of castes and classes will continue to turn out situations comical beyond all praise. French writers of comedy go to the slave states in America for subjects; but they might save themselves the long journey, and be better served, by crossing the channel and studying British society. It is an unwrought mine for the poet. In my own little country I have often regretted that the levelling civilisation at present in operation, would leave us no

original or foolish characters, but that all would be commonplace wise men. But such fears are now all dissipated, for even if the continent should be exhausted, 'old England' will for centuries to come furnish the world with subjects for tears and laughter. The time will undoubtedly come when poets will set out for Britain as gold-diggers do now for Australia.

Macaulay's New Zealander has no need to wait till St Paul's be laid in ruins, and the bridge of London broken down, to find a pretext for visiting England. He may do so profitably long before either of these events is likely to occur. Years hence, he can come and study among a modern people the remnants of a civilisation that has passed away, and carry back with him in perfect preservation objects of *vertu* from the middle ages, to delight the philosopher, the historian, and dramatist of his native country.

But I am perhaps unjust, and will conclude this letter with another quotation from Mr Wilson's book on India. After having spoken of the Brahminical ceremonies, he says:—'There are other gesticulations, all, to our seeming, very absurd, but they are not subjects of ridicule, because they are seriously and reverentially practised by men of even sense and learning.'—I am, &c.

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## LETTER XI.

EDINBURGH, April 27, 1863.

SIR,—It may appear a paradox, but it is strictly true, Britain has no middle class. I mean in a future letter to write about the position and influence of the towns and manufacturing districts, which in a certain sense constitute

a middle class in the body politic. Properly speaking, however, a middle class does not exist to any extent that can influence society. The theories and principles recorded in my last letters would be impossible in a country possessed of a middle class, as it would certainly interfere to prevent anything like the sheep and goat classification of the people above referred to. I, therefore, hold my belief in that classification, so amply proved by British writers, as a stronger evidence of the absence of a middle class than any statistical accounts furnished by tenants-at-will or feudal dukes. An independent spirit holding the golden mean might be possible, although not very probable, in a country shewing such statistics. But when we see the crouching spirit manifesting itself, we have a safer guide. The conclusions are then drawn for us by society itself. We can see both the perturbations and the body causing them, and in moral and political sciences, as in astronomy, it is sufficient to have one of these facts. The laws are analogous.

An indirect proof of the same thing can be gathered from the eager denial given to the existence of such extreme classes by most of the British public speakers. 'In this free country there are no such things as classes,' is a stereotyped axiom. The schoolboy who overturns the inkstand and spoils his copy in the first impulse of his terror, exclaims eagerly that it was not he. Innocence would remain silent; and in countries where there really are no marked classes, public speakers and writers seldom or ever mention such things. Orators in Britain, and especially the leading ones, seem to grow uneasy at the possibility of the existence of classes, and are in consequence eager to contradict it, treating such wretched inventions as Mahomed did the people who ventured to doubt his mission. He felt that many of his stories offered difficulties to the

human understanding, and consequently he was wise enough to provide against unbelief. Some public speakers, however, either from accident or from the fact that they take an oblique aim, hit at times the mark with startling precision. Mr Roebuck affirmed, in a lecture delivered at Salisbury last year, that the difference between classes in British society was as great as 'the difference between members of different races.' He was contradicted in the *Cornhill*, and justly so, with reference, at all events, to the judgment he passed upon the 'low classes,' which in his somewhat vigorous language he styled 'brute animals.'

As a rule, a man of genius will be a leading man in his nation; and history shews us that he rises with the greatest ease to the highest dignity in an unlimited monarchy, where the ruler unshackled can take into his service the best men, whoever they may be, or wherever they may be found. In a so-called free country, with privileged classes, it is a difficult task for a genius, who is not of the privileged race, to work his way. In Britain he must first of all make money, and as few men can undergo the twofold exertion of amassing wealth and cultivating the mind, it commonly falls out that the real genius perishes morally and physically in its struggle after riches, leaving, in the best view of the case, to his son, who will probably turn out a third or fourth-rate man, a title and a fortune, or to use the characteristic expression of the British, a 'position.' By a happy tact in keeping close to the 'Whig party,' and by successful literary speculations, Macaulay succeeded to a certain extent in fighting his way to some eminence. But this is one of the few exceptions, and he has purchased this distinction at the expense of his fame as a historian. Competent judges of history say, that as a historian he is entirely worthless. He is a virulent partisan, and writes

only to support the Whig creed, persecuting every other form of political belief with undisguised intolerance and animosity. Nelson is also an exception in another walk of life. In the British navy, however, there is something like promotion for real merit; the sons of high aristocrats perhaps for this reason do not find it always quite comfortable to be efficient seamen. But it may be that the discomforts which form this obstruction to birth and money will be removed by the changes now going on in naval architecture. It will undoubtedly be an inducement for heirs and younger sons of ancient families to enter the navy, when steam power and ball-proof cupolas and iron-sides make the naval service comparatively easy and safe, at least for the officers, and I should not be surprised to see the navy, with this important consideration in its favour, take the precedence of the land service.

Money making is, however, after all, the first step to eminence in this island, and we have Lord Palmerston's authority for saying so. In a speech delivered at Glasgow, he comforted the 'humble classes' with the assurance that it was perfectly within their reach to rise to renown, by successful commercial enterprise. A genius of an ideal cast of mind but of humble race, could in such a state of things blow out his brains in desperation if he found himself unable by his genius to break down the social barriers that impeded his advance. But the British are not so eccentric. They are possessed of a happy dulness, and are admirably broken in, hence they find the beaten track the only safe way to power and fame. It is in many respects a good method, but it is at the same time a method which excludes the well-educated and independent, though not wealthy, 'humble class.' Under such a system there must be proprietors and tenants in the spiritual world as well as in the material

one. A well-educated Scottish farmer who wrote a little book about farm houses, shewed himself a spiritual farmer as well, when he felt bound to contradict a certain nobleman on some matters. He was very meek, and it was obvious that he was much better informed than the nobleman; but then he was a tenant-at-will. The poor student at the university is a spiritual pauper, however talented he may be. It would not occur to his British mind to be independent in thought, when not independent in money matters. Such is the opinion of an accomplished scholar, whom I have reason to suppose very well acquainted with student-life in Britain. My quotations from the *Cornhill* on 'student-life in Scotland,' corroborate his words, which could indeed be safely deduced from the tendency of literature, and the bearings of the whole social system. The nobility of learning and genius goes for very little, when brought in contact with feudal nobility. A man of genius can be gazed upon as an interesting animal, and he may even be permitted to dine with nobles; but he is kept at his distance. British men of genius, however, are not proud. They play the part of walking gentlemen to the nobility without a blush. Thomas Moore, the Irish poet, was even proud of being entrusted with such a part. His letters to his 'Bessy,' published after his death by Earl Russell, are indeed characteristic. This wife was not invited along with her husband to dine, or dance, or spend a week with aristocratic nobles, and yet he cringed and bowed to these men, who thus insulted what ought to have been his dearest affections. A century ago in Germany, and two centuries ago in France, men of genius without titles or fortunes stood, to my certain knowledge, higher in the social scale than such men do at present in Britain. Thus in Germany rose Lessing, Goethe, and

Schiller, while France flashed her lightnings till the thunder-clap broke over Europe in the revolution, and Napoleon. We know the results on the continent. But Britain kept both the lightnings and the thunderbolt from her shore. The one is impossible without the other. She will have her turn at a later day. Better both for herself and for us all that it should be so.

It has oozed out from some writings lately given to the public on university matters, that scholarships, fellowships, and stipends are usually given to the acquaintances and relatives of the patrons, without, it would seem, any great respect for real merit. The students are thus early imbued with a spirit of dependence for their convenience in after life. They are bred up to be spiritual paupers, and this is in excellent keeping with appointments in the public service. The *Saturday Review*, which is, after its manner, considered one of the cleverest periodicals in Britain, has in its issue of the 4th April the following passage on church patronage:—‘Patrons who appoint on purely public grounds may be common in Utopia, but they will always be rare on earth.’ ‘The officers in the army are appointed by purchase; the officers in the navy gain their position by favour. The same rule holds good in the church,—some clergymen are appointed by the prime minister, who selects upon grounds purely political; others are presented by the Lord Chancellor, who generally relies upon testimonials; in other words, gives his livings to those who happen to be friends with somebody he knows.’ ‘Some job for their relations; others for their aristocratic acquaintances. The squire patron usually presents for one of two causes: either the candidate is a relation, or else he is a college acquaintance. Every political appointment in England is supposed to be a payment for some kind of

political service. If a squire were to appoint his son-in-law to a rich living, no one would think twice about the matter,—and so on in this style. And no smaller an authority than the *Times*, when treating of the same subject, on the 30th March, says,—‘ Whig chancellors have selected Whig clergymen, or at least the sons or friends of Whigs. Tories have done the same for Tories. Nobody who knows anything of patronage will object much to the practice.’ And in a later issue we read:—‘ Now and then livings are bestowed as rewards of merit. We know, indeed, but one certain road to a living for a man without money or interest. If he goes to college, and wins a fellowship by hard work, he may be sure of a college, living in due time.’ Lord Derby called this ‘ the worst kind of preferment,’ and strange to say he was not severely contradicted.

When the British press publishes such astounding principles, which are literally carried out in practice, they seem to have a vague feeling that all is not quite right, and therefore they often prepare the mind of the public by saying, with the *Saturday Review*, that ‘ public grounds may be common in Utopia, but they will always be rare on earth.’ The *Times* is in the habit of saying, on such occasions, that ‘ it is not wise to expect too much of mortals.’ We may suppose that the British, when thus giving up an ideal standard, will at last cease to adjust their course by the stars of heaven, because forsooth they cannot reach them. The consequence is inevitable, and perhaps when it comes they may wish to look for stars, and be unable to see them through the thick night which shall have descended.

This method of appointing public functionaries is thought to be one of the ‘ great principles of freedom’ which the colonists have carried with them from their

mother-country. Can we then wonder at the fate of the 'glorious transatlantic republic?' A people who buy and sell in the very temple, must, as a counterpoise, give away the property of the soil to a feudal body which can afford to be above such unworthy traffic. It will be an interesting recreation for philosophers to watch the social developments of America and Australia where the same symptoms have already begun to shew themselves. Britain is colonising these worlds with people, and with principles as well. There will yet be slaughter, which Liverpool and Glasgow may turn to their profit, in furnishing iron-clads; and Birmingham and Sheffield, by a sale of cutlery in the shape of bayonets, guns, and revolvers. Is not Britain indulgent as a mother to her colonies? She supplies them with people and with principles, and when these principles have borne their fruit, she generously furnishes them with fitting instruments of slaughter for mutual extermination. With this consideration before you, the boast of the British press is intelligible, that Britain understands the secret of colonisation better than any other country.

But to return to the subject of official appointments, it is the system, and no man is to blame. It is natural that the ruling class should provide for its relations and supporters out of the public purse, when such proceedings are applauded by the populace as proper; and it is natural that the populace should do so, for they have seen nothing better, and can scarcely imagine any other state of things. A stranger might be disgusted when reading the cringing speeches of ministers and other officials on the birthdays and wedding-days of their lordly superiors; but the old and sensible proverb should never be lost sight of in England: 'I praise the master whose bread I eat.' Besides, what independence do you think there could be in a

clergyman appointed according to the following system, which seems to be perfectly English. A man who is still living, having graduated at his university, and been duly ordained, made an application for an appointment to the nobleman on whose property he had been born. It so happened, however, that the church patronage was vested in a neighbouring Earl, to whom the suppliant was referred with a letter of introduction from his patron. The Earl gave him the appointment at once, and handed him back the opened letter, that he might see what testimonials he had brought. The letter ran thus :—‘Give this poor beggar a church, and I will make you two or three excisemen.’ Thus it was that these two nobles exchanged civilities, creating servile servants around them. And to burn in the humiliation as deeply as possible, the preacher of the Gospel is styled a beggar, which, in Britain, commonly conveys an idea as nauseous as leprosy once did in the Holy Land.

The constitution of the church of Budha is the only thing to which I can compare British society. There are patrons and patronage in every walk of life. Even troops of comedians and play-actors have their patrons, and I once saw the name of Lord Brougham thus honourably connected. A London merchant lately recommended his ham to the public by advertising that the Prince of Wales had patronised his establishment. In a people composed entirely of patricians and plebeians, this state of things is very natural. Appointments to offices are vested in different patrons. But, what some people would call even worse, important places in the government are filled up in the same way. Hence, students and other suppliants for office must make their selection either to come out as Whigs or Tories, and so strain forward to the goal as best they may. Success depends upon a nice calculation of chances exactly as in any

other business. Acting on this British principle, the Americans have of late years started as republicans or as democrats. Conviction has, of course, nothing at all to do with such a game. The whole difficulty lies in choosing your side, the party, namely, which is most likely to come soonest into power, and remain the longest. However, as a Tory and a Whig government frequently alternate, varied at times by a coalition ministry, the difficulty of choosing between liberals and conservatives is considerably smoothed down. The ups and downs of the opposing political factions are manifold, and hence the result of the appointments will be pretty much the same as in those states where officials are promoted by age, merit, and capacity, testified to by universities and other independent schools. It is, however, better adapted to the tastes of a sporting people to run a race for a prize, just as it suits a commercial people to buy and sell offices with all the rites and ceremonies of commerce. When an official grows old or unfit for duty, he does not by any means retire from office, if the political party that appointed him be not in possession of the keys of the treasury. This he does with the view of having the place he vacates re-filled by one of the same political hue. This is only strict justice to the party that appointed him; for a man who has chosen his party must follow it through thick and thin. Of course, he can think as he pleases in private, if in such a system there can be any thinking at all, but he must not write or speak out of his party. When it is then remembered that the leading men both of Whigs and Tories belong to the highest aristocracy, the officials must be altogether servile to the ruling oligarchy. If, therefore, they can do without the patronage of a private nobleman, they only escape from the frying-pan into the fire. There is no possibility of any one standing aloof

from all parties and striking at the root of these abuses. The men who in other countries would be independent, either as men of letters or men of science, must in Britain remain moral paupers all their lives. What ought to be their free unshackled thoughts, are cabined, cribbed, and confined within the narrow limits of a political dungeon. For this reason also, there is such a lack of ideality in the modern British literature. It is, as all the world knows, admirable in many sciences; but taken as a whole, it wants elasticity sadly. You feel on perusing it as if shut up in a cellar, and though the cellar be as full of gold as the Bank of England, still you are shut out from the cheerful sun. It is no wonder matters are thus. The real worth of a man is not recognised unless he can be as a slave either to rank or to party. Why, even the Holy Scriptures are made to yield to the classes and rank of British society. A professor \* of the university of Oxford says:—‘There may be some one or two rare natures in the world in whom there is such a divine courtesy, such a gentleness and dignity of soul, that *differences of rank* seem to vanish before them.’ The learned professor proceeds to demonstrate that Scripture must not be literally explained, and exemplifies this, by the feet-washing of our Saviour. He adds:—‘Neither is it suitable for us to wash one another’s feet, or to perform any other menial office, because our Lord set us the example. *The customs of society do not admit it.*’

This man is one of the so-called religious liberals who are now stirring up the English church. Volumes could be written of such quotations; but I will limit myself to the remark that it will be edifying to learned commentators and divines to see the Scripture tested by British notions of ‘rank’ and

\* Jowett. ‘Essays and Reviews,’ page 363.

'customs.' The British may be excellent courtiers and rare appreciators of rank, but they will scarcely occupy a high position among European commentators of Scripture. I have read something of their commentaries, but what they have not borrowed from Germany is to my mind of little value. Their language even is not pliable enough to meet the exigencies of such investigations, in spite of the help it receives from the Latin. It is like dancing in wooden shoes. But whatever the language may be, the sentiments conveyed by the quotations given above are very illustrative; and should such a style of interpretation become popular, the Bible would find, in the customs and notions of rank in vogue in British society, more formidable opposition than it is ever likely to meet with from Bishop Colenso.

When, therefore, the Bible must give way to rank, it is no wonder that men who profess to follow the Bible should do so. Lord Brougham, who is by birth at least half noble, and who has been raised to the highest law dignity of the land, began his far-famed speech on the Reform Bill by saying—'I feel that I owe some apology to your lordships for standing in the way of any noble lords who may wish to address you.' There are other passages in the speech equally characteristic of the pliant tone adopted in Britain, when lords are the parties to be addressed. This intellectual serfdom has, as I before remarked, a tinge of religious feeling about it. It is not the mere flunkey, but even men like Professor Jowett, who offer incense to rank. Royalty is approached by sheer prostration. Assuredly the British outstrip all other civilised nations in the adulation of royalty. A glance at their daily papers will shew this. Instead of laughing at the curious incident which happened lately at a royal levee, they roared like lions at the idea of 'the purity of the English court' having been 'violated' by

the presentation of a returned convict. We certainly are no revolutionists, and our king sits as secure on his throne as any other monarch in Christendom; but we would only have passed a joke over such a mistake, which was not likely to become customary, or to be hoarded past as a precedent for future use. But neither we, nor any other European nation, regard either rank or the court as 'sacred' in a religious sense of the word. We never speak of 'contamination, in meeting a man, however sinful or lowly he may be. The British boast that they have a deep sense of loyalty. Certainly they have, they go crazy to gain admission into 'sacred' circles. I thought at first it was innocent vanity, but I now see it goes far deeper.

A third or fourth-rate proprietor, but a person of 'unquestionable' birth, informed me that a man, however learned he might be, never ventured to speak to a man in a better worldly position without due deference to his rank and wealth, and by consequence superior knowledge. Suppose a party of men worth, say L.1000 a-year, engaged among themselves in familiar conversation, and a man of L.5000 enters; the conversation instantly drops, as if a cat had suddenly come upon a party of mice. Even 50,000 pounders would be completely silenced by a 100,000. It is practical gunnery exemplified. Money is the meted standard of a man's worth. It cuts short many an intricate question, to adopt at once the easy method of weighing the purse. The *Times* for 18th February more than confirms all this; it says:—'We are a money-giving, money-receiving, and money-expecting nation. Everybody who enjoys or claims a single inch of vantage ground over another, is expected to pay for it. The least superiority, however *moral*, has its pecuniary estimate. The crowd look all about, and if they see a man looking, or living, or

assuming to be, a bit better than his neighbour, they expect him to prove his worth or his pretensions by an argument addressed to their understanding, which part of its composition the crowd carries in its pocket.'

After you have indulged in a hearty laugh at such an avowal as the above, you will, I fancy, grow serious and exclaim, Why, society must be formed of Shylocks in a country where the leading journal can, in so brazen-faced a manner, lay down a money morality, and even designate the doctrine as such. Nay, worse, it must be a society of savages.

Gently, my friend, gently; you draw your conclusions too rashly; British society is not in reality so bad as you might be led to think from such quotations. I have in these, my letters, shewn you many loveable sides of it, and I may here add, that its ladies are very charming and agreeable. The inhabitants are very much like other people, and if their society be not exactly 'the most civilised that ever existed,' it is at least fairly civilised in many of its aspects. Their cunning and skill in carving, working in metals, and manufacturing, are, I think, unrivalled. From a manufacturing point of view, their civilisation is perhaps the highest that ever existed. Their commercial civilisation is in itself a wonder. There are, of course, many things which look black. When, for example, in the midst of overwhelming wealth, you read reports of people dying of starvation; when you read of infants thrown like cats or curs into the sewers of London every year by thousands, till the bed of the Thames is said to be paved with murdered infants; when you see a convict dragged to the scaffold, and feel it impossible to divest yourself of the horrid idea that you are witnessing a judicial murder; when, I say, you see and read all this, the conclusion that everything is not quite so civilised as it looks, is a just and reasonable deduction from well-founded

premises. But a good police force, and an administration of justice suited to the present times, are all that are wanted to do away with such anomalies. The whole administration of justice is indeed very like what our own was some two hundred years ago, when our judges wore wigs. It is altogether in the old style, and if it were to be remodelled, it would entail the appointment of a well-educated and independent body of officials. This the British press would undoubtedly call a bureaucracy; and as it would form a middle class, it might be dangerous to the present frame of society. It is, therefore, more conservative to try at least to advance with such barbarities dragging at their heels, and crippling the gait. They are not so dreadful when you get accustomed to them. The British themselves do not so much as see them. The system is, at all events, one under which a goodly lot of malefactors escape, as a compensation for some judicial murders. The British are far from being a cruel people—on the contrary, they are so merciful in their penal system, that they have of late been inundated with garotters. They may go to extremes, I grant it; but you cannot expect much of a legislative body composed principally of riches and rank, with domestic affairs so annoying as these are. To deal with them requires earnest men, who go to Parliament to work, not to play at being senators. Turn it which way you will, it is not at all so bad as it looks. In daily life, such barbarian principles and practices are toned down, and the human heart is beautiful, even though morals and intellect be a little darkened. I now see the error of constructing a society from passages in old writings. I dare you to single out from any literature of old, selections more deeply tinged with barbarity than those I have here quoted from the writings of men who occupy eminent positions in the British world

of letters. You know what barbarous names we apply to the nations of old and of the middle ages ; in the writings of which periods we meet with startling ideas now and then. We call such ideas flashes of lightning in a dark and troubled night, but they ought rather to be regarded as will-o'-the-wisps, by the light of which one of many, Macaulay used to take self-complacent walks into quagmires; wholly forgetting what a fearful state of society he left it in the power of future historians to depict for Britain, from his own sayings and writings. Take, for example, from his Essay on Bacon, his assertion that a man who can make good waterproof shoes, is a greater benefactor of mankind than all the philosophers of old put together. When such sayings can be applauded, the establishment of money morals is only another step nearer to the temple of Mercury. We are, however, all fond of money, although we may refrain from preaching its gospel. When people see around them the vast power which money possesses, it is no wonder that they call it almighty, as a British people across the Atlantic have done. They talk of the 'almighty dollar;' but as everybody knows so well the understood substantive, dollar is very often left out, and the 'almighty' left standing. Such a people may perhaps conquer the world, with their gospel and their almighty. Who knows? With such confessions they at all events implicitly appeal to arms, and invite to plunder. The world may accept the invitation. Their own 'born beggars,' and their 'ten-pounders,' will certainly do so. Fearful slaughter is going on in America at the present moment, and fraud and falsehood are practised on all sides. The 'almighty' holds its imperial sway. But in Britain all seems as yet well.

Shallow observers might even call the state of things here

perfect. When they see pampered dogs running amongst half-starved people, when they see the dashing equipages and gorgeous liveries of the aristocracy and gentry,—when they contemplate wealth and ease in a thousand shapes all over the land, the exclamation is common :—‘ We too must be Englishmen ! ’ An Anglomania thus pervades every country. It is a disease—it must run its career like any other epidemic. How then can you assert that British society is frightful and uncivilised ? Confess your error, my friend, your conclusions have been hasty.

And now, one last word at parting with these money-topics, and this money morality. Would you not deem it an achievement of genius to see such a hard and dry theme as finance is, invested with the hues of poetry and figuring as an epic. The *Times* has reached this climax. Like most British papers, when treating of bank and money matters in general, the *Times* is exceedingly fluent and flowery; but read its leader for 3d April, upon the revenues, and say if it be not poetry all out, not, perhaps, rhyme or blank verse either, but still full blown poetry, as much an epic as *Telemaque*. I give you a few samples :—‘ Like the ilex of the ancient poet, the revenue, trimmed, pollarded, and denuded of its branches, springs up anew, and only invites, by its increased fertility, the repetition of a treatment which agrees so well with its hardy constitution.’ . . . . . ‘ Never did that accomplished orator (Gladstone) extend his hearers more complacently on the *rack*; never did he conjure up so many *terrors*, or darken the announcement that he had escaped a deficit with so many gloomy prognostics.’ When you read about this ‘ *rack*,’ and these ‘ *terrors*,’ with the consolation offered to the writhing victim, in the shape of a declaration that there was no deficit in the revenue, you will recall the story of the

Jew who tried long but in vain to cure his little son of sea-sickness. At length he drew a silver coin from his pocket, and holding it before the eyes of the agonised child, exclaimed eagerly :—‘ My dear little boy! look at this, it will cure you.’—I am, &c.

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## LETTER XII.

EDINBURGH, *May 1, 1863.*

SIR,—I take it for granted that my last letters have furnished you with the key to British society. You can now, if inclined, open for yourself the door of this feudal hall, and inspect its curious and miscellaneous contents; its bullet-proof armour and rich carvings of modern times strangely contrasted with the grotesque ornaments and devices of old. I have no doubt you can explain it all full well for yourself; still I shall keep by you, and act as a guide, conveying to you at intervals my promptings and remarks, as opportunity may suggest.

To begin first of all with the press, it is a fact known everywhere, that the British press is free. It is, moreover, a fact not to be called in question for a moment. A people holding the principles I have mentioned above can speak and write what they list without the slightest fear of endangering the pillars of society. When the poisonous teeth of the serpent are broken out, it can be trained as an affectionate and domestic animal. But, for my own part, I like it better in its natural state, with its deadly fangs intact; for, when deprived of those, it has to my thinking lost its demon-like grandeur, and its slimy loathsomeness alone is left. It is perhaps impracticable, but I must confess that I value more a society which can produce, and be enchanted

by, a Camille Desmoulin, than a society whose creed is 'birth,' and whose gospel is money. I prefer electricity to malaria. I may be blasted by the one, but that I think is more eligible than to die by inches in the weary wasting of a nauseous fever.

My likings or dislikings on such a subject are, however, of small importance. The real gist of the question lies in what manner these two different forms of society are to be treated with respect to the press. In the one, the press can be perfectly free, but, in the other, it is a grave consideration how far freedom can be accorded in a society not yet calmly settled down from its violent transition from ancient manners and customs to modern thoughts and opinions. I take France as a metonymy for the Continent, because the Continent is really moulded by France in such matters, notwithstanding the different temperaments of Frenchmen and some other Continental nations. We Scandinavians, for example, are more like the British in our frame of mind, but in our mode of thinking we are decidedly influenced more by France. For this reason it is that I, in some matters, may appear to be a little hostile to British society ; and possibly even unjust—unjust or not, however, in other respects I see clearly that the British press can be free, and also the grounds why it can be so. British history too has taught me that the British press can be stifled when the writers are deemed dangerous. The author of Junius would even have been stabbed, it is alleged, had he not written under a feigned name. A reflection of the lightning flashes from the Continent seems to have reached Britain about the end of the last century. But the danger was averted by repressive measures of different kinds. The juries, suborned by the ruling class, were, or pretended to be, afraid of the revolutionary spirit, and re-

turned verdicts which would have disgraced the most venal judges of any country in the greatest emergencies. Even so late as 1812, Leigh Hunt was for his writings condemned to imprisonment for two years, and a fine of £1000. The freedom of the British press then is not so old as is commonly boasted, and even in our own days, hints have been dropped that speakers and writers ought to be prevented from exciting the famine-stricken inhabitants of the cotton districts. The thing is natural enough. Every people is the best judge of its own police measures.

The freedom of the press is understood to mean the unshackled permission of putting in print what you like. To be responsible for it is another thing; and in Britain actions of damages can be more easily raised than in most other countries I know of. I have read verdicts of British juries which make the freedom of the press wholly illusory, and the British press last winter vehemently protested against some of the judgments. I have seen the most egregious attempts at deception practised in broad day—by means of flash advertisements. Lawyers have told me that it might entail an action of damages, if such things were called down or sneered at by the press. By way of example, and to give you an idea of the state of matters, I saw lately a person, assuming to have some medical skill, plastering his shop door, which fronts to a public thoroughfare, with pictures of death, scythe in hand, grinning ghastly on the passers-by. I own I was shocked, but the crowd stood around listening to the servants of this disciple of Esculapins. It is but justice to tell you that this practitioner was an importation from New York, but he struck his roots in a congenial soil, nevertheless. Few appeared to see anything ridiculous in the exhibition, and if a public writer had thought it so, he would not have risked interfering, because

of the consequences. Such things are considered articles of free trade, but satire is not exactly looked upon as such, probably because few understand how to deal in it. In common life, the British are surprisingly free. They can traffic and carry on businesses not even strictly decorous, without interference from public authority of any kind. The old British saying, 'My house is my castle,' has got so wide an interpretation that it is altogether incompatible with a well-ordered administration of justice. In the more violent times of old it was certainly a great thing that your house should be your castle. But now-a-days, it gives society an air of real barbarity. A wit, like some that have risen on the Continent, would convulse society, and turn it into a roaring volcano of laughter, did he employ his pen on such things as I here see passing before my eyes. But British society would not laugh at this free trade in ridicule, and if it did happen to do so, the writer would be mulcted in damages, because public laughter forsooth trenched upon the business of the laughing-stock. The British cling to these old customs, which, even in their ludicrous shapes, are somewhat venerable. The plebeians have their 'sacred rights' as well as the patricians, and the patricians can spare such a right to the plebeians so long as their own is unimpaired. I can well believe that such of the nobles as are sufficiently educated, and sufficiently conversant with the world, will laugh in their sleeves at the good-hearted people who shout aloud,—'This is the freest country under the sun.'

There is an old belief among us, that a wizard, by walking round a flock of birds, can keep them within the magic circle thus traced by him. The poor birds fly shrieking, hither and thither round the ring, but cannot get beyond it. This is called walking the bird-circle. Such a wizard

must, in Britain, have been the founder of society, for British minds cannot yet break their bird-circle. The only difference is, that the British fowls do not shriek as the other spellbound birds are said to have done, and it is therefore doubly safe to let them have free scope within the narrow circle. The Continental nations have broken this spell, and for that reason they must be treated otherwise when regulating the press. An example will serve to illustrate my meaning. A well-known nobleman, when still a stripling, gave utterance in the House of Lords to certain opinions which were anything but relished by a section of the people. Shortly afterwards, he was surrounded in the streets by a crowd, which plentifully bespattered both his carriage and himself with mud. Last summer an attempt was made by a noble Duke to alter the plans of the Thames embankment. For this he was railed at savagely by a portion of the London press. You thus see what I before remarked, that the cities form a kind of middle class in the body politic, and when their special interests are at stake, they shew fight, in the heat of which their belief in birth and pedigree is liable to evaporate. Now, suppose for a moment that similar cases had occurred in our country, we would have behaved otherwise. Our line of action would have been ruled by principles, and we would neither have railed nor thrown mud; but our action would have paralyzed the system which sent a green youth to take his seat in the House of Lords, and allowed privileges to become engines of despotism in the hands of single individuals. The British mode of argumentation resembles very much the treatment the images of gods receive from some wild tribes. When the unlucky idol does not grant their prayers, it becomes for the moment an object for abuse and ill-treatment; it is thrown into the dirt,

and even broken in pieces. All this, however, can happen, without in the slightest degree diminishing the general belief in the gods, of which this is but an ill-fated representative. It is practical surely, but it is as surely narrow-minded.

Even, however, if public speakers and writers in Britain were not cooped up into narrow bounds, they would not overstep their present limits. They are partisans, and they are merchants,—the latter especially. The *Times*, which is accepted as an expounder of British opinion and British feeling, takes generally a mercantile view of the questions of the day, even when they happen to be of a theological nature. A bishop who called the press infidel, had the satisfaction of hearing from that public instructor, among other edifying sentiments, the following, in a leader of 14th April :—‘ There is no point on which an *ordinary man of business*, desirous to offend no prejudices, and *alienate no customers*, will be more careful than to exhibit all possible respect for the Bible.’

It is a marvellous working of nature, that our daily thoughts and pursuits impress their likeness not only on our minds, but even on our manners and appearance. It is remarked that people who are much occupied about horses and dogs take many important features from these animals. I remember of once seeing a parrot-vendor, whose nose was evidently assuming every day more the crooked proportions of his stock-in-trade. It is thus perfectly in accordance with the laws of nature, that the *Times* should speak of business, and customers, even when adducing reasons for respectable behaviour towards the Bible.

We were simpletons, my friend, when we indulged in that glorious vision of the press, standing like a watch

tower, whence wakeful watchmen kept strict guard over politics and public morals. I am far from undervaluing the press, but still I cannot help feeling disappointed in my youthful dreams about it. America has also in this respect taught the world a good lesson; and when we see the greatest representative of the press in England lay down commercial principles as its leading rule, we are compelled to look for some other guardian of 'the people's rights.' Respectable merchants are very good and useful in their way, but neither they, nor their principles, will do in literature. Mercury did not satisfy the Athenians; they had a predilection for Jupiter and Apollo. 'Buy an Apollo,' said an Athenian sculptor to Mercury himself in disguise, 'I shall give you a Mercury into the bargain.'

The press in Britain is divided into two principal sections, 'liberal' and 'conservative.' This is, as far I can see, only a different denomination for the same business, for in reality there is very little liberality in the so-called 'liberal' papers, except, perhaps, in some points affecting free-trade. Many of my quotations are from the 'liberal' press. When you know this, you can form your own judgment. The *Times*, however, stands so far above all party politics, that it generally sides with the party in power. It is really the *Times*, and has reduced trimming and time-serving to a theory and moral principle. It is quite a new invention of modern civilisation, although the principles themselves are very old. They have not, however, ever before had the good fortune of being supported by such a mighty advocate as the 'organ of the world,' as it sometimes has been termed. The world is advancing in its way, and perhaps it will soon enter its millennium, for when all are alike cunning, the final result is pretty nearly the same as if all were honest and downright. They will

then counteract each other, just as the very artifices of merchants themselves contribute to establish the fair prices in a market, and act as a safeguard to the purchaser. The difficulty, however, lies in placing all upon such a level, that unfair play can turn out fair.

From the bearings of my quotations, and the arguments adduced, you can readily infer the contentment of the British press with the present position of their affairs. With the exception, indeed, of some Irish and Catholic journals, it is a generally received opinion that the British realm is something quite supernatural. They are not, as I before remarked, haunted by ideals. They imagine that foreign princes and kings visit their island only to 'get a peep at their institutions.' It may be that kings—despotic kings especially—are easily satisfied in this respect, for certainly they could scarcely obtain anywhere a sight more congenial to their notions and policy than British society. The men of thought who, on the Continent, prove themselves to be very annoying, have not yet sprung up in Britain. For my own part, were our little kingdom in a position to state that its society was perfect, exhibiting not the slightest flaw requiring reformation, then would I say, let us complacently stretch ourselves and die, for to live on doing nothing is to expose ourselves to the certainty of petrification. I would even venture the opinion, which I think is justified by the quotations I have brought forward, that the British mind is already in an advanced stage of petrification. There is no movement, no action, betokening a healthy existence, beyond an outcry for the reconstruction of the fleet. When a member of Parliament was garrotted in the streets of the metropolis, there was, of course, some strong talk about the penal system; but even in such a case as this, they did not strike at the root. Be-

fore the parliamentary session began, some papers were bold enough to say that there was little or nothing to amend in the social system as it stood. But the *Spectator* surmised that Parliament might find some work to do respecting Ireland. The people there, who, in the words of O'Connell, exercise the 'wild justice of revenge,' will, I think, grant that the *Spectator* was perfectly right. The fact is, however, very little can be done without endangering the whole framework of society. Therefore, even if British writers had power to think about matters urgently demanding redress, they would probably recoil from the task of announcing them, as they would undoubtedly foresee the direful crash which the adoption of their views would cause. It is, therefore, safer to appear contented, and set down these British principles and practices as beneficial to mankind. We would have to search through vast libraries, and to draw from our researches hazardous conclusions, did we not see before us these valuable principles and practices codified by the most competent authors. Every one who knows anything about the agrarian condition of Britain, may, without fear of erring, conclude that the popular elections there are a mere mockery. Should he doubt the logical accuracy of his conclusion, he can witness an election, speak with voters, and see and hear his inference confirmed. He can examine leases with the clause inserted that the farmer must vote as the proprietor orders him. He can see peers returning their eldest sons to represent constituencies on their own estates, or perhaps, through compliment, exchanging civilities with other peers. He can see bribery in the most varied shapes, in the shape of damages inflicted on crops by game; in kisses to the rosy daughters of the farmer; in donations to parish charities; in exorbitant payments for barn-door

chickens ; in purchases of fabulous supplies of butter. He can see and hear all this. It is in every way conclusive ; but I would rather see clear statements set forth in the public papers, detailing the bribing prices, and hear uttered brutal threats to turn voters out of their leases should they venture to vote against their lord's will, than all this under-hand jobbing and illusory freedom. There can be no mistake about it, the political argument is reduced to what a man ' carries in his pocket.'

In the above quoted issue of the *Times*, where money morality is so lucidly expounded, I find the following statements :—' There lies before us an abstract of the expenses incurred by the two candidates at the late election for the North Riding. It is made out by the auditor, and consists only of perfectly legal items. If any body received a pound, or a pound's worth, or a promise, simply for his vote, that is a separate affair, and does not shew here. Mr Morrit's legal expenses amounted to L.9396, 16s. 10d. ; Mr Millbank's to L.8003, 16s. 9d. ; total L.17,400, 13s. 7d. As a general rule, a candidate's ' legal expenses bear about the same proportion to his actual expenditure, including all the demands and all the appeals made upon him, *as the nucleus of a comet does to its tail*. The nucleus is measured by thousands, the tail by millions. In all kindness and simplicity, we hope and trust that Mr Morrit had L.100,000 in a perfect accessible and disposable form before he stood for the North Riding, and that he will have as much before he stands again.' ' If these enormous sums can be legal, we should like to know what is illegal.' . . . ' As there are only about 11,000 electors in the North Riding, the legal expenses per head is about 30s, and it is much more a-head for the number actually canvassed and brought to the poll.' The whole

article could be quoted with profit, but I must content myself with the following :—‘ The country and the population are in the gripe of wealth much more than they are aware of. Take a given territory, and it will be found practically under the power of a certain number of landed proprietors, large employers, and professional firms.’

At the Southampton election, it was stated that the contest was in reality not between two political parties, but between two steam companies. The ‘conservative candidate’ carried the day by promising to the leading firms in this seaport town, the largest shares in the companies, and these firms had the majority of voters under their thumbs in the shape of salesmen, travellers, and clerks. No doubt, Southampton made money by its ‘conservative’ principles, and the result was seriously regarded as a defeat by the ‘liberals.’ The member for Southampton now sits in Parliament as a ‘conservative,’ and always votes, as a matter of course, against the ‘liberals.’ The *Times*, which is in the habit of averring that it is not wise to expect too much of mortals, confesses its fears, ‘That the root of the evil is deep in the British character and social state.’ But still it is more practicable to let matters take their course, and only talk a little about reform, which can, of course, never be carried through. ‘Parliament does its best,’ says the *Times* in the same leader—‘and we doubt much if it could do more.’ Parliament speaks in edifying terms about bribery, and at times disenfranchises a constituency for a few years. It is justice of the same sort as that which punishes the seduced, but not the seducer. The *Times* of 21st March says, ‘We have long since arrived at the conviction that it is a shabby thing *to be bribed*, but that it is disgraceful *to bribe* is not yet a truth.’ Of course it happens sometimes that a briber is declared incapable of

sitting in Parliament. A feeling, or a semblance of shame, must be shewn in high quarters when matters are too scandalous. But to bring the elections to the same footing as they stand on in other free countries, would provoke a violent revolution, by establishing the worth of man in the room of the worth of blood and money. The present system, however, suits well a commercial people. It is bone of its bones, and blood of its blood. Hear *Punch* on the subject :—‘ There is no use in making hypercritical mouths about the matter; public opinion is not very strong against any *election dodge*, and rather applauds smartness of any kind, *if it be successful*.’

Behold the old Lacedamonian principle. In that land of aristocrats and Helots, it was all right to steal when not caught in the act.

Such is the press, and such the elections held out to the world as paragons of perfection. Europe must be poor indeed, if she can shew nothing purer than this. No other public press would dare to justify such national disgraces, without being actually mobbed or stifled, and any other Parliament elected upon such principles, would be sneered at. Not so much as a grain of gunpowder would be wasted on it. A single pen, in the hand of a man of genius, would be more than sufficient to strike it with palsy. Should it even happen to be a good Parliament, it would be doomed to the same fate. And justly so. A people cannot give up its honour and moral qualities for the sake of convenience and wealth. It ought to be only the secondary aim of a government to make its people prosperous; the first aim must be to preserve its moral and mental qualities. The government must act upon the same principles as individuals do. But I find I am growing serious, and on a ludicrous subject too. It is much better to look at things

on the bright side, and abide by the common British saying :—‘ We are a commercial people.’ This is the justifying medium for such things as ‘ election dodges.’

Much has been written about the Reform Bill, both in Britain and elsewhere. Lord Brougham in his speech expected great things of it, and certainly something was gained. We are all in the habit of overvaluing a reform when bringing it about. Experience sobers us. Some ‘ rotten boroughs,’ however, were more easily swept away than old propensities. ‘ We are a money-giving, money-receiving, and money-expecting people,’ especially at election seasons, and it would seem that political arguments can be ‘ carried in the pocket ’ as well now as before the Reform Bill. The increase of large estates, and shortened leases seem also to have made fully up for the sweeping away of ‘ rotten boroughs.’ The belief, moreover, in birth and pedigree, is evidently on the increase in the British empire, if I may judge from the literature. Blood is, therefore, as well as money, duly taken into account at elections. Hence, I would be inclined to think that matters are even worse now than before the Reform Bill. One important change, however, took place at that period. The great commercial cities obtained representatives, and this has imparted to the British politics a more marked commercial character than they before possessed. This new political body is known as the ‘ Manchester School,’ and its doctrines, are, as far as I know, only commercial principles in a political setting, with the law of supply and demand for its chief commandment. It must of course have great influence, for it represents the wealth of ‘ the middle classes,’ ‘ counterpoised by which,’ in the words of Lord Brougham, ‘ all their lordships’ castles, manors, funds, and acres, if brought to the hammer, and sold at fifty years’

'purchase, would kick the beam.' It is, therefore, no wonder that even so unobjectionable an aristocrat as Palmerston in his public speeches should be compelled to cant about free-trade, and the law of supply and demand. Bye-the-by, free-trade now bids fair to become as good a measure for a people's civilisation, as the consumption of soap, civility towards ladies, or any other standard of the like kind. There is, however, no fear of this political school revolutionising British society. It is perfectly orthodox in its opinions of birth, and fishes for titles as much as any other. It amasses in single hands, in the cities and manufacturing districts, people and property, as the aristocracy does in the country. It thus falls in with the common process, and is, by nature, more despotic than a landed nobility, which, even in its most drivelling state, will, in many important matters, never lose sight of gentlemanly conduct. When some members of this school point to America as a land of freedom, the absurdity is palpable. Mankind has happily got rid of that nightmare.

This Manchester school seems to occupy a somewhat ill-defined position in Parliament between the two sections of the British oligarchy—the Tories and the Whigs—whom they support alternately, as the chances appear to favour their commercial views. They are, however, in general more independent than such candidates as a certain Mr Dent, who, at the last Totness election presented himself to the constituency as 'an humble follower of Lord Derby.' He is a fair sample of these humble followers, by whose aid Tories out-vote Whigs, and Whigs out-vote Tories. I wonder much that British writers never dream of shearing these silly sheep. They follow their leader as flocks in the East follow their shepherd, patiently enduring every fatigue, and trusting to find a

recompense for it all when they shall be led themselves or be able to lead their relations and friends, into the rich pastures of office.

Regarding these struggles of party in the British Parliament, and the evils they engender, the *Saturday Review*, in its issue of 17th January last, wrote in a somewhat impartial spirit, thus:—‘ With us, it is a constant peaceful struggle for office. With us, the temptation constantly occurs to look, not so much at the measure as at the proposer of the measure—to vote for a thing proposed by A, which would be voted against if proposed by B. This sort of party is the bane of legislation. They hinder the most important kind of legislation which directly concerns the welfare of the nation, but out of which no political capital can be made. The minister is tempted to bring in, not the measures which are essentially best, but the measures which will best strengthen his position. The private member is tempted to vote for and against measures, not because of their merits, but with a view to keep the ministers in, or to turn them out; but it is too bad if we are not allowed to reap the advantage of an exceptional tranquillity (of parties), merely because a few men have an insatiable hankering after office, and stick at nothing whereby they may dislodge those who bar their own approach to the sweets of power.’ Does this passage corroborate the justice of the high praise usually bestowed on the Parliamentary system of Great Britain? Make, however, some allowance when passing your judgment, for this reason, that the more talented members of the British oligarchy must have something to do, and even people of wealth find it worth their while to get into power for the sake of assisting, from the public purse, their needy friends and relatives. And thus you

see, this great commercial people has even aristocrats.

All forms of government share this fate, in common with other human inventions, that in the run of time they become worthless, and are thrown aside. They are only temporary forms, adapted more or less cleverly to their times, and it is childish prattle to talk of a model government in political science. We are always moving on, and as we move, the horizon before us moves also. Standing upon one ridge, we see another stretching away in the distance. So it is with ideal governments, and every other thing. That government may be called the best, which, with the greatest ease, can assign the right place to the right man, and can, with the greatest security, undergo changes as times and circumstances demand, without convulsing the whole state of society. Youth and life are pliable—age and death are stiff. Our notions and ideas are similar. Aristocratic forms of government have proved themselves robust so long as they lasted; but they have ever been followed by violent collapses, when they failed to render society inert. To make the prosperity of a nation a criterion of its government at any given period, is just as absurd as to measure a man's worth by his talent for making money. American democracy was deemed excellent, because for a time the land prospered under it. The same reason can be urged in favour of the British and Russian aristocracy, for the Russian nobility and their autocrat have certainly improved Russia. A truce, however, to this theme, I will not enlarge on it more, but leave the English constitution with these, my remarks, to your own quiet study. Bear in mind that it is an old European institution a little modified. The trial by jury, and the general administration of public affairs, shew this clearly. The

ancient forms gave way before the new in most other countries, but the feudal barons of England were so powerful that they maintained things in their original state. What English history calls revolutions, was nothing more than a determined resistance to new forms of life which were beginning to break through the venerable crust of the middle ages on the Continent. There, despotic and military monarchies levelled society, and thus paved the way for humane feelings, and therefore for freedom. People did not at the time comprehend the real progress which these new forms were promoting, and they consequently looked towards England, which they in reality were fast leaving behind. Still suffering from the effects of this transition, Montesquieu, and even Voltaire and Guizot, cast admiring glances towards England. German writers did the same; and this may serve to explain why the English constitution gained such high repute. Down to the present day, Continental authors have followed in these old ruts. You can account for this, however, in two ways—either they do not understand British society, or they use it as a lever against their own, which they are anxious to reform, after the model of the political party to which they adhere. People on the Continent are generally as ignorant about Britain, as the British are about the Continent. The one cannot understand the other, even if they should happen to see anything beyond the outsides of each other's modes of life and institutions. They represent two distinct epochs of history brought face to face, and as Continental visitors to Britain labour under the preconceived opinion, cherished by the British themselves with a still livelier enthusiasm, that Britain is far in advance of other countries, their eyes are blinded to facts which, but for this, would have been unmistakeable. The

same delusion haunted me for a very long time, even when rambling through the rural districts. It would, however, be preposterous vanity on my part to say that I see better than other people. I, therefore, only invite travellers from the Continent to investigate this interesting subject, and pass judgment upon the opinions I have here briefly hinted at. I affirm that public opinion on the Continent has advanced so much, and left England so far behind, that a Continental conservative would, in Britain, be set down as a radical. England, therefore, still makes good her claims to the title of 'Old England.'—I am, &c.

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### LETTER XIII.

EDINBURGH, *May 8, 1863.*

SIR,—When in my former letters I spoke of literature, I adduced it more as illustrative of my opinions respecting politics and pedigree, than as a theme upon which I intended to dilate at any length. Now, however, I shall take it up as my subject-matter, and lay before you a few remarks—the results of my inquiries into its nature and characteristics. It would, however, be presumptuous in any one individual to take in hand to write, in even general terms, about a subject so vast as that of British literature. The literatures of great nations like the British, French, and German, present so wide a field, that the most deeply-read scholar can at best only be said to glean—reaping is out of the question. A tolerably educated man may, in general, have perused more or less closely their classics; but an immense distance intervenes between a superficial reading of this nature, and the deep

study required to entitle a man to pass his judgment upon them. A still greater disparity exists between reading the classics, and being conversant with the entire literature. To read the works of science, art, and fiction, the reviews, the magazines, the periodicals, of every size, price, and colour, which issue from the prolific press of Great Britain, would be more desperate than the undertaking which Justinian thought himself justified in pronouncing such. It is perfectly appalling to think of the loads of reading matter daily thrown out upon the world. It is little wonder that a German writer affirmed that the world would one day be set in a blaze by printed paper. Superficial, then, I must be, driven to it both by the massive proportions of my subject, and my own inability to grasp it.

You will in every land find not a few men who complain that people now-a-days read and write far too much. In our modern communities, there are many people, especially ladies, whose main business in life seems to be reading. From whatever motive this may be done, it creates a demand which requires a supply. People must have their newspaper, their periodical, and their novel, as punctually as their daily meals, and writers have in consequence their customers as well as butchers and bakers. Hence, reading and writing, like the other daily wants of life, become mechanical. The issue of this, like many other modern problems, no man can tell. It looks as yet very charming and very enlightened; and it would, perhaps, be premature, not to say idle, to forecast either good or evil as its result. At the point we have arrived at, it is however apparent that literature does not improve by progress. When it assumes the character of a business, it must be conducted on business principles. For this there

is no help. It is also obvious that the best writers become in a manner retail dealers of thoughts and sentiments, spinning out their merchandise to the most slender and attenuated proportions, in order to give it marketable bulk. They have their shops and their salesmen. But it too often happens that poor authors become the prey of their merchants, who understand how to manage business, and furnish a supply congenial to people's wants. On the lips of authors, as well as of other men, you can hear not unfrequently the important question, "will it pay?" Hence, like other tradesmen, they furnish wares according to the prices, and might say with as much truth as Holberg's Peer Degn, "Will you have sand, or dark mould, or fine clay, thrown on your dead? I have fixed prices for each."

This state of things is perhaps carried further in Britain than elsewhere. People read much, or at all events they seem to do so. And as the British are 'a commercial people,' and perfectly understand the laws of supply and demand, they provide plentifully for the requisition of printed matter, and turn it cleverly into the market by flashing advertisements. Even, in so doing, literature is made to serve as a vehicle for bringing under public notice camomille pills, cod-liver-oil, revalenta arabica, cutlery, and soap. The best magazines are used for this vile purpose. An author sees nothing degrading in his article appearing in close proximity with such advertisements. In the daily papers of the present time, such things are common all over the world, but to find them creeping into respectable magazines is an invention reserved for the mercantile British mind. I believe, however, that in this, as in many other things of a like nature, the British are far outdone by their American relations. But it is strictly

business, and as such is unreduceable to a literary standard. The articles are in general written with cleverness, and the impression you receive from a perusal of the periodical literature, is the same as you take away from a well-ordered shop. You see it stored with elegant manufactures in every department, all the works of clever heads, and skillful hands. Authors, indeed, shew as much tact and cunning in fashioning their articles, as artisans do in theirs. The fine arts stand exactly in the same predicament as letters. Take painting as an example. An artist, Mr Frith, had the luck to get £10,000 for three small pictures, and the critics, looking at it from a commercial point of view, encouraged British artists in general thus: —‘Prices like those which Mr Frith and others are receiving ought to *inspire* our artists.’ The same encouragement, you will observe, could be held out to a man starting in the coal trade, or going into the cod-liver-oil line.

Of course, we all expect a recompense for our works in one way or another, but no true artist can be *inspired* by money. Business men only draw inspiration from that source, and only ‘a commercial people’ would set up such a standard. It would, however, be very wrong to speak in sweeping terms regarding commercial views in literature and art. In so great a nation as the British, there must be many honourable exceptions. I only say that such commercial views struck me as the leading characteristic of art, of reviews, magazines, and the periodical literature generally. So it must be. In a community where money always is ‘put before men,’ and accepted as a legal tender for the highest honours in the state, why should not inspiration have its market value? In a land where ‘the least superiority, however moral, has its pecuniary estimate,’ genius and inspiration cannot be expected to form any ex-

ception to the general rule. The people of these realms, like a king of ancient times, would turn all they touch to gold. Heaven preserve them from the fate of poor Midas. I have read a poem by Tennyson, which he is said to have written to order, and for which he was paid the fabulous price of half-a-crown per line; the price paid seemed to me the most wonderful thing about it. His inaugural hymn on the opening of the Exhibition last year, was a sort of dissertation on free trade. It was set to music, and sung by a powerful choir. It sounded in my ears like the dirge of deceased poverty and starvation. Yet it was not so; for both enjoy a strong life still. In fact, literature, like other things, is viewed from a mere commercial point, and the works of genius subjected to their hackneyed law of supply and demand, and custom-house regulations. Regarding the literary condition of the Americans, I find, in the *Victoria Magazine*, the following remarks:—‘The short-sighted refusal of the Federal Government to consent to any law of international copyright has told most unfavourably upon native talent. Publishers are but men, and it is not to be expected that they will *pay high prices for American works of genius*, when they can republish the best productions of English literature for nothing. Hence, there is little encouragement for American authors to produce works for which the demand is limited, and the remuneration inadequate.’ A citizen from Tyre or Carthage might have written thus, but a Greek never. These commercial people are dead, and have left few of their traces behind. Do you think it will pay to ask always for payment?

It is a fact generally known that English ladies indulge in novel writing; they thus contribute to supply a demand, and so far it is all well. Ladies possess a peculiar talent

for the rehearsal of gossip, and in a modern novel such things are important. They can, besides, describe dress to a nicety, and pourtray the workings of a woman's heart oftentimes successfully. Lady novels are, therefore, useful novels after a fashion, which opinion the public seems to endorse, for they generally enjoy an extensive circulation. For my own part, I confess I do not like them, and when I do read them it is under protest, and *ex officio*. Still would I say to these ladies, if they asked my advice, write by all means; and to the readers, read and admire. It is a state of things which will have its day. It is idle, and in this case ungallant, to rail at it, although to my mind it redounds more to the honour of the ladies, to say that their destiny is more refined than to turn authors. Woman is a type of the individual, man of the historical life. The one is a species, the other a genus. Between the qualities of man and woman, there is a difference, such that the one cannot trench upon the ground of the other without incurring the penalty which outraged nature generally awards. To call a man a woman, or a woman a man, has, in all ages, been looked upon as a deep insult. Curiously enough our old Norse laws imposed for such an injury, a double fine.

It is very consoling, and, all things considered, very beneficial, that the lack of genius and imagination on the part of novel writers can be supplied with illustrations from pencils of men who enjoy celebrity in that work. Some Britons are found who draw so very well that their taunt is not altogether without grounds, when they say that Continental painters cannot draw. Their water-colour paintings well support their boast. It would be unjust to call this talent for drawing a mechanical one, but more unjust still it would be to call it ideal. It lies, I think, on the

frontiers between handicraft and real art, and is a technicality which the great artist must possess, just as the poet must be a thorough master of his language. All this, however, aside, the woodcuts and sketches with which British artists illustrate their magazines and works of fancy, though in themselves excellent, are, I fear, but slender supports of an infirm imagination, and poor enliveners of intellectual dullness. You will always observe that, in the decline of any one art of a given period, the relative art is infallibly dragged along with it. Thus, the ancients painted their works of sculpture, and recommended their poetry by terseness of expression and dry grammatical accuracy. In daily life, the fading beauty resorts to the same artifice to keep fresh the bloom of her decaying charms. It is a misapplied instinct of self-preserving nature.

Since the days of Scott, the British novel literature has abounded in such descriptions of nature's scenery, and human features, that the reader's imagination is wholly lost among the luxuriant weeds. To illustrate by drawings these scenes and features is therefore only a natural and a very necessary step taken to preserve the reader from bewilderment. A vivid imagination and sterling poetical power would need no such auxiliaries. The whole scenery would, by a few slight touches, pass before the eyes in a manner so vivid, that the painter's rarest skill would but spoil it. A single line in Homer can wake a smile at the expense even of Apollo Belvedere; and to call in the art of the sculptor or the painter to pourtray to us the parting of Hector and Andromache can only be pardoned on the grounds of the artist's presumption, or the reader's deficiency of imagination. Such things may be grand after their kind, but as illustrations of true poetry

they are worthless and worse. All this has been admirably set forth by Lessing in his 'Difference between Poetry and Painting.' Our old literature has the same descriptive power in its Sagas and its poetry, and you find it now and then in Shakespeare and other high-class poets. But they always use few words. They who set reality above imagination shew that they have no imagination at all. Edinburgh, in the unrivalled situation she occupies, presented perhaps one of the grandest views ever seen, when illuminated at the festival of the Prince of Wales' marriage, and even that was to my mind dull when compared with the scenery suggested by old tales. I say the same of the great Exhibition. It is enough to make a man pause and consider if he has heard aright, when looking upon what certainly may be very grand sights, to hear the usual British cant, that 'reality has outstripped imagination.' Not but what the saying may have truth in it at times, as, for instance, in the case of crime, or ludicrous combinations. Thus, I find reasons enough to account for the present tendency in Britain to illustrate with drawings all possible and impossible things. They perform the service of spectacles on the nose of a gentleman.

These British novels are certainly clever in depicting scenes from real life, but it is mostly the same theme over and over again. Dry and loose reality, without any poetic charm, and pictures from half-cultivated life, weary and trite, make up the staple commodities of such writings. Even such a master as Dickens seldom soars beyond these limits. High life is, of course, sacred ground in a society where even the best writers minister as serfs to 'gentlemen by birth;' and if some writers do venture to touch it, they put on their softest and most delicate gloves for the occasion. Last summer, I read of a nobleman who had fallen

in love with a Highland girl, a lady of the lake, without the high birth of Sir Walter's heroine. They travelled America together, but on their return home he was compelled by his aristocratic friends to desert her and his child. She was a high-spirited girl, and disdained his offer of compromise. It was altogether a touching tale, because he really loved her, and only yielded to his mother's, his sister's, and, I may add, his own belief in blood. Such a subject, adapted with poetical power and ordinary literary skill, either for the stage or a novel, would have blown into the air the House of Lords itself, had such a man as a peer ever dared to enter it. But the breeding propensities of the British mind are a happy safeguard against the possibility of such a poet, and such an effect in 'this land of liberty,' liberty forsooth to be a brute. The wish is here, as the *Edinburgh Courant* puts such matters, to see blood 'running in broad ducal and baronial streams,' whereas it would have been mixed up in this case with the 'quiet rivers of gentry and middle-class rivulets.' She also, perhaps, like Tennyson's Clara, would have incurred death, brought on by an 'honour unto which she was not born.'

British society is therefore not likely to be awakened by its present jingling novel bells. Tocsins only will rouse it. For this reason, I should be inclined to think that Europe has very little to learn from the present British literature of imagination. Historians of literature have, however, a deeper interest in the subject, and they will certainly point out, for the benefit of ages to come, these interesting features.

I am afraid, though sorely tempted, to speak of their scientific writings. There, the British mind, untrammelled by prejudices, either social or political, displays its native

vigour and acuteness. Metaphysics, and the other branches of abstract philosophy, seem to find a more congenial home, and more attached admirers, on the north, than on the south side of the Tweed. The characteristics of what is known in the history of philosophy as the Scottish school, are, I presume, familiar to you. I shall only add, that the more recent works of Sir William Hamilton shew that such studies are still cultivated by Scottish minds, with the depth and taste of the earlier days of Dugald Stewart and Reid. The British can shew few men of note in pure mathematics, but in their application the national mind is again at home, and in its right place. The scientific labours of Britain's artizans, the works of her engineers, the grandeur of her mechanical productions, place her alone, with no nation even second to her. The efforts of America, in the same sphere, are ingenious rather than scientific, and the results of cleverness more than of real talent.

The geological writings of the British are admirable above all I have ever perused; and, curious enough, the Scots here again take the lead. Among them the pursuit is regarded much in the light of a recreation, and it is followed up with ardour, even by those whose tastes and modes of life would appear farthest removed from such studies. Much of this is perhaps owing to Hugh Miller, than whom no one ever invested a science with more magical or captivating hues.

In historical literature, the English mind again becomes bewildered in the mazes of party and prejudice. With the exception of Lingard, England has no reliable historian. The Attic purity and beauty of Hume's style only increase the dangers of being misled by his false version of facts. Macaulay writes entertaining essays in the Whig interest.

In Scottish history, there are Robertson, Tytler, and Scott. The former is also known by his *History of America*, and of Charles V. The history of Ireland has yet to be written.

In the literature of fancy, Scotland has contributed her full share. Burns is a born poet, and there are in many of his poems a natural simplicity and charm. His idiom, too, gives to his verses a nationality which endears them to the Scottish heart; and I should be inclined to think that the power of Burns over the Scottish mind lies chiefly in his language. He is no *great* poet in the usual acceptation of the phrase, but he seems to have possessed all the qualities that go to constitute a great poet. All that they wanted was development. It is hard to understand how a mind like his could rest contented with what it knew, and not strain every point to raise itself higher. There must have been some flaw in the diamond. Even at that time an English *Cornhill* could have bemoaned the fact, 'that University education was within reach of all classes in Scotland.' And Burns was not exactly on the footing of a poor man. Even a 'born beggar,' with the natural gifts of Robert Burns, could have fought his way. At all events, it may be said that it is a something for mankind to regret, that such a beautiful nature as his should not have been more fittingly cultivated. Now and then you meet with scattered verses in his writings which are worthy to take a place beside the very best productions of any literature. As an example, here are the second and seventh stanzas to 'Mary in Heaven':—

'O Mary! dear departed shade!  
Where is thy place of blissful rest?  
Seest thou thy lover lowly laid,  
Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?

Still o'er these scenes my mem'ry wakes,  
And fondly broods, with miser care;  
Time but the impression deeper makes,  
As streams their channels deeper wear.'

Or, take again this cluster of similies in 'Tam o' Shanter.

' But pleasures are like poppies spread,  
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;  
Or, like the snow-flake in the river,  
A moment white, then melts for ever.

Or, like the borealis race,  
That flit ere you can point their place;  
Or, like the rainbow's lovely form,  
Evanishing amid the storm.'

When Scotsmen place their Burns on a level with Shakespeare, there is for the act reason sufficient to defend it from the charge of presumption. The Scottish poet lived among the people, and consequently many of his songs retain a popular character; whereas Shakespeare has spoiled many a popular proverb and old adage by a false rhetoric, and a vitiated taste. One or two instances occur to me worth the setting down. The first is the celebrated saying of Constance in King John:—

' O, that my tongue were in the thunder's mouth!  
Then with a passion would I shake the world.'

I have heard this very same thought, in our Norse Highlands, from the lips of old inhabitants who never knew of Shakespeare's existence. Neither is the thought to be met with in our literature; they could not therefore have seen it there. The saying, as I heard it, runs as follows:—

' Vöre mi tunge i munnen paa tora, det vilde shaka i bergum,'

Which may be rendered literally into English thus :—

‘Were my tongue in the thunder’s mouth, *that* would shake the mountains.’

Here there is no mention made of ‘*passion*,’ which is implied in the very act with stronger force than if expressed. Besides, the word *mountains* gives us an idea more concrete and a great deal more true about ‘thunder,’ than the term *world*. The shaking of the mountains is made the effect of the very fact of my tongue being in the thunder’s mouth. No effort of mine is expressed. The agent sinks, as it were, into nothingness, before the mighty auxiliary he has called in, and the verb which expresses the action assumes an impersonal form. The popular wisdom and visions of ages understand rhetoric and poetical force better than any single man, even should that man be Shakespeare. Homer and our Sagas, not to mention the Bible, would have put this thought in a shape somewhat similar to that given above. Again Constance says :—

‘He talks to me, that never had a son’

This thought our Highlanders express thus :—

‘Det er ei barnelaus tunge som talar’

(It is a childless tongue that speaks). Here you see a still more powerful rhetoric than in the sentence above quoted, aided too by alliteration. A man who would set himself the task, could trace the grandest thoughts in Shakespeare back to a popular source. This is no fault in Shakespeare; on the contrary, it is his greatest praise. He codified, as it were, the people’s wisdom, and he lived so close to the middle ages that he could do so. England was as yet uncivilised, as people now-a-days would say. Little or nothing was read, but we see that there was at least thought and a better mouth-piece than Shakespeare scarcely could

have been got. He literally snatched the brands from the burning.

You see my views of Shakespeare and such men differ from the opinions usually received. I may be wrong, and I would not have you suppose me aiming at more than furnishing you with hints. These, I confess, are grounded on my own experience, and thrust upon me by the recollection of my boyhood. Philosophers—German philosophers especially—are in the habit of writing volumes to expound the meaning of this character and that passage in Shakespeare. It is all, to my mind, very plain and the most simple thing in the world. I feel assured that he was not at all a philosophical dreamer, but took matters straight forwardly. In the same light, I regard the old sculptors, on whose works people now-a-days write books, and ponder deeply to find what they meant by this and that. They build up, from these works of sculpture, both philosophical and religious edifices. Mr Ruskin, in his oftentimes beautiful writings, is, in his way, somewhat smitten by this contagion. Such philosophers might have taken a lesson from Thorvaldsen, who was the plainest of men, and we may be allowed to suppose that he was as like Phidias in mind as he was in the art of handling a chisel. When people asked him what he meant to express by such and such matters, his usual answer was, ‘I thought very little about it, but it seemed to me the only possible mode of doing it.’ He studied nature, and was gifted with an ideal mind. There is the whole secret. Any man who has ever written, or said, or done anything worth, will confess that his answer would have been exactly the same. It is neither a charm of witchcraft, nor a power of hidden philosophy, which calls for explanation and provokes learned commentators to issue ponderous tomes. It

is more to be wished than hoped for, that writers on the sacred Scriptures would keep such simple things in mind.

Time will tell more severely on Scott than on Burns. The former has written some excellent ballads, and not a few pretty songs. But many of his novels will, I fear, soon sink in oblivion—and the sooner they do so, perhaps, the better for his enduring fame. Sir Walter was also a speculator in literature, and the venture bore him bitter fruits indeed. With all this, however, Scotland can set him up against scores of commercial literary firms lately established in England. You must not misunderstand me. I have no grudge against these firms; on the contrary, I would, were I an Englishman, perhaps establish a firm of the same nature. All I would say is, that money-making and lasting fame are incompatible. The very laws of nature forbid it. Of a man's life-labour, the result worth the keeping cannot be much. He produces very little that did not before exist. It is Liebig, if I mistake not, who says that the bulk of a huge animal can be so purified and condensed, that you can carry it in your pocket. And it is even so with the intellectuality of the greatest genius. Take even Shakespeare and Goethe, test them, and depend upon it, there will not be more than a very small volume of them left to stow away in the ship of history. The craft would be swamped otherwise. They were matchless in their day, and a good deal longer too. And to be so was even something great. The modern firms provide only for the daily wants of some ruminating beings. But they make money. It is, therefore, just they should be reminded that they have in their lifetime received good things.

It may be my foreign taste, but I am free to confess I cannot relish Milton. It is, however, more the poet's subject than the poet himself that I find fault with. We

cannot tolerate at the present day the comedies and poetry of the middle ages, which treated of religious theories and personages. We look upon this as profane, from a religious point of view, and in the worst taste, if we look at its poetical aspect. Religion and poetry should, I think, be kept apart in this respect, how much soever they may otherwise aid each other. Religion can, with difficulty, be enhanced by poetry. It is above it. The highest poetry withal is but the expression of a religious heart. To see Satan and hell depicted in the style of Virgil conveys, at all events to my mind, the impression of a burlesque; but to see the Supreme Being handled so, is to my feelings really hurtful. I grant there is something homely and childlike in treating religious persons and places as the people of old times treated their gods. They made them fight, and hate, and love, and intrigue, quite in the manner of mortals. It was familiar, and there is nothing more amusing in Homer than Zeus' love-stories, and his quarrels with his wife. All such things are admirable in him. It is like the charming play of children. But in Virgil it becomes affected, and all poetry down to the middle ages is an imitation of Virgil, the characters only being changed. Thus the old Saturnalia have their relics still preserved in the carnival. The greatest figures among all these poets—Dante, Milton, and the recent Klopstock—are, of course, very serious, and there certainly is no affectation on their side. Perhaps Virgil was so likewise, but their poetry sounds affected with all this. It may be that I am too fastidious, and have lost too much of childhood; for I remember when a boy, that I invested all supernatural beings with human propensities, very like my own, and I planned my heaven and hell from my earthly experiences. Then, such poets as Milton struck me with awe. Perhaps

I was then right, and am now wrong. I wish to convert no one from his own manner of thought. I would merely expound my own views. Connected with this affair, I will only mention the different modes in which the character of Satan has been limned by different artists. Dante makes him so far as I remember very bad, and very abominable. Milton makes him a very strong personage indeed :—

‘His spear (to equal which the tallest pine,  
Hewn on Norwegian hills to be the mast  
Of some great admiral, were but a wand)  
He walk’d with.’

But it would seem that he is possessed of a feeling heart :—

‘Tears, such as angels weep, burst forth.’

He is very like the Greek Ares, and our own Thor, or rather Utgardeloke.

Goethe, in his Faust, makes him a witty, flirting gentleman, who surmises that the spreading civilisation of the present day is also beginning to tell on the devil. Goethe has left the old serious devil school, to which even Byron belonged, and his notion of Satan is quite Gothic. In most of the old tales of Germany and Scandinavia, Satan is really a very poor devil, who always comes off with the worst of it, and who, in spite of all his cunning, figures as a confirmed blockhead. Our Oskefis plays off interminable jokes against him; and when a boy, I was often told that the devil was a dunce of whom I never would learn anything useful.

I venture to say that England proper has had no genuine poet since Dryden, except Byron. In him is the true *furia poetarum*. He has produced passages which, as our Norse people would express it, draw forth hail showers of tears. We all know, perhaps too well, Byron’s faults.

He has himself confessed them publicly. But, in spite of these faults, he will remain to be England's pride.

'The beings of the mind are not of clay.'

I do not think Byron shared the British popular belief in 'breeding and blood.' This would have been too grotesque. The head of such a ghost would, by a dexterous stroke of his scimitar, have rolled down the marble staircase like the head of his Faliero. In his youth, the few currents that have set in towards the British shore from France, were running. He shews what a formidable energy there lies in the British race when it finds proper exponents. It is one of Thorvaldsen's master-strokes, when he places Byron on a shattered rock. There is an awful beauty in this statute as you see it in Thorvaldsen's museum in Copenhagen. The last stanza of Byron's poem to himself in Greece, on his last birthday, I will give you as expressive.

'A thing less often sought than found,  
A soldier's grave, for thee the best;  
Then look around and choose thy ground,  
And take thy rest.'

Shelley wants true poetical dash. He is a dreamy, shadowy, mystical poet, like his contemporaries Hoffmann in Germany, and Stagnelius in Sweden. Tennyson is now highly praised in many quarters, and he can sometimes be vigorous. Two single lines, taken at random, I will give you in proof:—

'And I said, my cousin Amy, speak, and speak the truth to me;  
Trust me, cousin, all the current of my being sets to thee.'

This simile from the 'current' is, to my mind, an example of poets using with propriety modern discoveries and scientific researches.

There appears to be a tendency in Tennyson to take up

classic versification and sentiments, but I am afraid it never will do. Goethe tried something of the same kind in Germany,—‘Herman and Dorothea,’ ‘Römische Elegien,’—but it did not strike root. It is past, and our Gothic languages do not seem adapted to such antique forms, although English is saturated with Latin.

The best recommendation in Tennyson is, however, his matchless purity of language. It augurs well for British literature that such a good example should be set of pure Anglo-Saxon. If poets would take Tennyson, and prose writers Addison, as masters of style, the future of British literature would, in this respect, be bright. The best minds, indeed, appear to be bent in this direction. A study of the remaining dialects, and Anglo-Saxon with the allied languages would, together with this tendency, bring about a new epoch in British literature. I must here mention Dickens for his English idiom, and at the same time for his independence of parties. It is a pity that, with such rare recommendations, he should have been drawn into the whirlpool of commerce.

‘The unhappy sister Island’ has contributed a large share to the literature of the United Kingdoms. These witty people show their relationship in race to France. Sheridan has written the best comedies, since Shakespeare, with an apparent French touch. And so has Goldsmith, the loveliest of lovely poets, ‘who wrote like an angel and spoke like a child.’ Swift is an awful versifier, but unfortunately he ‘gave up to party what was meant for mankind.’ Moore is captivating, his *semi-reducta* Venus forming a contrast with Byron’s erect goddess. Could Irish wits be emancipated from prejudice, and be brought to bestow their attention more on British society, the effect would be convulsive. There is in it enviable matter

for the pen of an Aristophanes or a Beaumarchais. They might, after studying English society, exclaim with Heine, perhaps the greatest wit of them all :—‘My darling fools, you are my best friends ; when I make you my theme, I draw a bill which no banker ever for a moment hesitates to honour.’—I am, &c.

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#### LETTER XIV.

‘Juristen sind böse Christen.’—LUTHER.

Lawyers are bad Christians.

EDINBURGH, *May 15, 1863.*

IF Luther’s opinions possess any weight among the British people, the above quotation will seal my doom as an authority, when speaking of religion. The topic of religion, however, cannot well be left out when treating of a nation which professes to be eminently religious, and which enters its claims among the nations of the earth to superior sanctity.

The ecclesiastical history of all ages is in a perfectly visible manner repeating itself in Britain. It is composed of a long catalogue of sects, and if these sects do not, with the acrimony of some Russian denominations, wage a devastating war regarding whether children should be baptised by dipping two or three fingers in the water, they, at all events, appear to quarrel and fight over matters of very small account. People, who like me do not believe in any short-cuts to heaven, but hold the simple faith that there is only one way, and that a narrow and a thorny one, are utterly at a loss to understand how sensible people can

break up into so many parties. History, however, as I read it, shews very clearly that people split into sects in proportion to their roughness of mind. When religion has no existence inwardly, it must shew itself outwardly, and a slight difference in external ceremonials may peril the salvation of one who is unable to see anything in religion beyond the dry crust of outward formalities. Such a one builds his temple, just as it may happen, in Jerusalem or on Garizim. The foundation of spirit and of truth is beyond his capacity. To a mind so fashioned, it is a matter of the gravest importance whether the church spire be surmounted by the cross or a cock, and whether, in the church itself, there be candles, images, and organs. Upon such things, so far as I can see, the Scottish Reformation chiefly rested. Knox was as thorough-paced an Iconoclast as any that lived in the ninth century; and many a venerable Scottish church bears testimony to this day of his reforming zeal. There was, of course, also some change of dogmas involved in the Reformation, but the man who does not look upon the Bible as an act of Parliament, or a criminal code, will attach no great importance to such alterations. He knows perfectly well that the Holy Scriptures in this respect can be subjected to the same treatment as the writings of the old poets. You can construct out of them whatever tenet you please—they stand any amount of warping. They resemble, in this respect, those faces of India-rubber which can be turned into every possible shape—the more you twist them, the greater the grimace. In this lies their immortal virtue. It makes them applicable to all ages, and to the views of every class, high or low, learned or ignorant. Were they otherwise than infinite, they would share the fate of all finite writings. Either they would go in pieces, or become obsolete;

they are as the floating liquid ocean, contrasted with rocks, sand, and shell.

'Time writes no wrinkles on *their* azure brow.'

It is eternity compared with time.

There was withal a degree of spirit in the Scottish Reformation, whereas the English Reformation was altogether worldly. Henry VIII. wanted to get rid of the old love, before he took on with the new.' And hence—

"Gospel truth first flashed from Boleyn's eyes."

The courtiers found the job a good one. They could turn it to their advantage, and get possession of ecclesiastical estates, while the nobility found it worth their while to assist in expelling the old deans and Bishops, in order to get their younger sons appointed in their stead. Englishmen have all along been of a practical turn of mind, and you know they feel proud at being called pre-eminently practical, in contrast to the ideal and dreamy Germans. They sneer at philosophy—German philosophy especially. I have seen it somewhere remarked that the excellence of the English ritual is due to the fact, that the men who composed it did not believe in a single word they wrote. However this may be, it was no difficult task to compile an elegantly-written Ritual. All that required to be done was to use the pure English of the time in translating and adapting the Latin services of the Catholic Church. No doubt the English ritual is very good; Englishmen themselves assert that it is the best in the world, but of course, all is matchless that they happen to possess, and they seriously admonish Europe to learn from them. They put, as they style it, a moral pressure on Europe, by holding out to her their institutions.

While on the subject of sects, I may remark that it is quite natural that the British church should abound in them. Only the sons of the aristocracy get the important posts. This is but a corollary from the quotations recorded above. Secure in their position, these, of course, care very little either about their own profession or the duties of the church. They play at being bishops, and the sheep are left to tend themselves in the wilderness, as best they can. Generally speaking, it cannot be otherwise under such a system. A learned and talented clergyman, but of 'questionable breed,' and without 'family connection,' or 'favour,' or 'money,' in short, without any of the acknowledged British recommendations, has reasonably nothing left for him except secession, emigration, or strychnine.

So would *we* say. But here again I must remark, that the British are not so eccentric. They are practical, and above all, they are admirably broken in. More noise was, however, made about such matters some two hundred years ago, before the people were so wholly 'in the gripe of wealth.' There were then more freeholders, and the tenantry had not as yet lost all their primitive rights to the soil. There existed, consequently, at that time, a more independent spirit among the people in religious, as well as in political questions. At that juncture, we also observe the growth of sects to have been most luxuriant. Seeds of these found their way to America, and have produced goodly crops. But England seems then to have been dropping away into a slumber, which continues even now. Secessions on that account have become rarer. Some greater minds, such as Pusey and Newman, have, however, of late shewn that the old spirit is not quite extinct, though it may have been for a time dormant. This however, has perhaps a closer

connection with purely theological questions, than with church government. If so, the ground upon which I tread is dangerous. I therefore avoid it. I shall give you instead, a quotation about school and church matters from the *Times* of May 6 :—‘ A deluge of assistance has covered about half the schools in the kingdom, leaving the rest high and dry. The favoured schools are assisted at the average rate of about 12s. a-year for each child, some at a much higher rate. Besides them are thousands of schools, with an aggregate of hundreds of thousands of scholars, left without a sixpence. One vicar has a L1000 a-year, his neighbour not quite L50. One town returns two members to Parliament; another, with twice the population, not one. People find there is “ nothing at all remarkable, and nothing to call for alteration, in one parish of a thousand people, with a poor clergyman, no squire, no endowment, bad land, and universal poverty, not receiving a sixpence out of the Parliamentary grant for education; and a neighbouring parish, with an equal population, a rich rectory, a resident squire, an endowed free school, and many well-to-do farmers, receiving L70, or even L100 a-year out of the grant. This some people think perfectly natural and proper. They consider it no more strange than that one parish should be all wood, another all down; one a quagmire, another a sand-hill, another a water-meadow, and another a stone-quarry. A system which helps the rich and fortunate, and neglects those who are already neglected by fortune, cannot possibly stand long without some attempt to square it.’ It is “ a system which enriches the rich, and leaves the poor alone.” Do you think it possible for a high-spirited clergyman, or even a schoolmaster, to be satisfied with such a state of things ?

But this is only a special branch, which, to my mind,

does not at all appear so unbearable to a lofty mind, as the distinctions drawn between the higher and lower clergy. The man who occupies an inferior position, may very often possess both more talents and more learning than his superior. Even in this spiritual domain, the draining principle is carried through with scientific skill. The press last year, treating of the appointment of some bishops, remarked that the clerical boundary between patricians and plebians, lay among livings of about L.300 a-year. This, however, appeared to be for a lower breed of patricians. About L.700 a-year is the real boundary, always of course increasing to as many thousands. Then begins the sacred ground, walled off for the exclusive use of the nobility. There may be exceptions,—if there be, I bestow upon them their usual duty of confirming the general rule. Upon this ground, noble clergymen must fight, for they have also to encounter the changes of Whigs and Tories, and the influences of more powerful and adverse patrons, and more august family connections. In the army, commerce plays a more important, at all events, a more open part, although the purchase money for a post to lead men to battle is a trifle compared with the power of 'favour' and 'family connection,' and other moralities of the like kind. A hard strife of it even these nobles have, and all these contending interests must, I suppose, produce much the same effect in the church, as in secular offices, by elevating to his proper place, the proper man. The system is said to 'work well'—but every system bears the same character. Of late, however, the plebeians seem to be getting tired of acting as footmen to the nobility in the divine service. They turn their back upon a calling which is only suitable for serfs. They can never be beat; they can emigrate, or find employment in trade. The

*Times* has lucidly shewn this process in the church, but it either did not see the real abuse, or did not dare to take the bull by the horns. The most important body in every church, viz. :—the common clergy and the schoolmasters, must, of course, more and more deteriorate in a country where the principles of appointment are such as in Britain. No man of talent or high aspirations will enter on a career that excludes him from preferment to important posts. It is, therefore, no wonder that 'spiritual aid' begins to be felt wanting, just in proportion as common people begin to understand the true situation, and turn away to find employment in other walks of life. But in so over-peopled a country as England, there will always be found blind to lead the blind. In times so prosperous, however, they will look for higher remuneration for their labour. The lower clergy and the schoolmasters must also learn money morals from their rulers and teachers; and we are within the mark when we suppose that the mob even will in due time learn the same lesson. In its issue of May 5, the *Times*, speaking of the want of churches and ministers in London, remarks that 'money is now everything, personal service nothing,' and 'money is always put before men.' And yet the *Times* can appeal to religious zeal, pointing to Christ and his apostles, saying that what they did is what 'any one can do any day, anywhere, if he has the mind to do it.' No, no, such self-sacrifice cannot be done in a nation where the supremacy of money is a confessed fact. Such a nation is like the characters in old tales, who sell themselves to the devil. There is nothing for it but to continue in the service they have entered upon. An inspired and self-sacrificing clergyman or schoolmaster would, in such a nation, only be an anomaly. It was stated in this article that there were districts in London with 40,000 to each

church. And London is rich enough to pay for churches, and clergymen, and schoolmasters. It is a curious vagary of the *Times* to speak of what Christ and his apostles did. In a poor district, such language would be appropriate. But London, which lends money to so many governments can, it would seem, keep matters a-going with money. It will, however, take a good deal of money to raise London to a level with any other Christian town. It appeared to me very like Pekin, in more respects than in its countless infanticides. I saw homeless people lying about like sheep, in cellars, and gangways, and on the very streets. There were literally dens of thieves and malefactors. The aspect of London in such localities is altogether that of a heathen city, even when no garotting is going on. You might fancy yourself living among paupers, with no Lombard Street or Belgrave Square near you. In such vicinities, it is certainly out of place to speak of Christ and his followers. The overwhelming riches of these parts can, it would seem, do without the one, and care little for being numbered among the others. At all events, their policy and behaviour in certain matters do not at all entitle them to use such names in such combinations. They have accepted of a money morality, and a money policy, and they must go on, and stand by the consequences.

Once upon a time, in a certain district called Röldal, a wizard engaged to destroy all the serpents. After making sure, from diligent inquiries among the inhabitants, that no serpent of any great size was to be found in the province, he kindled an immense fire, and placing himself before it in a straddling posture, laid his incantations upon the serpents to run betwixt his legs into the fire. All of a sudden a noise is heard, and a monster snake is seen curling and coiling forward at a rapid pace. On it comes

in the path of the others, but its huge bulk is too much for the straddle of the unfortunate wizard, whom, spell-bound by his own magic, it tosses headlong into the devouring flames. Röldal, since that day, has shared the same good luck as Ireland, and been wholly free from snakes.

Under the same government, and with a society in the main features similar, life in Scotland is more independent than in England. It is not, however, so far advanced. Generally, considerable time must elapse before the laws of society can tell off their results. The multitude are good practical logicians. Only give them time. Throw them a principle, they will not fail to draw it out to its remotest corollary. In 1843, a considerable body of Scottish divines found the established church government unbearable, and seceded, constituting themselves into a dissenting body, which they called the 'Free Church.' Some trifling dogmatical questions may perhaps have played an unimportant part in this movement; but the modes of appointment, and patronages were, as far as I can learn, the main reasons of the disruption. The schismatics, in their first fervour, wrought with the energy of zealots. Every year added to their numbers, and the rapidity with which voluntary contributions flowed into the treasury of the new church, seemed to augur well for the soundness of the principles it represented. All this appears, however, now to flag, and there is a perceptible uneasiness on the side of the leading members of this church. The 'Sustentation Fund,' as it is called, becomes more and more of less value. So it must naturally be. A church should be a national institution, resting on a solid earthly as well as on a spiritual corner-stone. It will otherwise, in the run of time, more or less assume practises and tendencies incom-

patible with the dignity of a church, and at variance with the feelings of its most valuable members. Thus, it always happens that religious sects are compelled to become business firms, imbued with all that rancour of competition which common-place people greedy for bread usually display. But, in constituting even a church, common-place people must be taken into large account. In the world they will always be a majority. This 'Free Church,' is not exempted from the fate common to all sects. In Scotland, and in Edinburgh especially, stringent animadversions have of late been made on the manner of spending the Lord's day—animadversions which would be disgraceful, were they not ludicrous. If the clergy were paid by Government, or in accordance with some established law, it would not be necessary to institute a reign of holy terror to prevent the hard-working people from taking a railway trip, or a walk in a garden on the Sabbath, in order to drag them to the churches against their will. It is a pity that apparently sensible ministers, and simple-hearted congregations, should be compelled to play such parts for the sake of the emoluments accruing from crowded churches. They must have taken a leaf out of the theatrical manager's book, and copied his mode of letting out his boxes. I have watched this movement for some months, and I can only explain it in my old way—to save the leaders of such movements from the worst imputations—they are a practical people, with good common sense. I do not think that statistics will sanction the inference that these church-going people are better than their Continental neighbours, who allow themselves a greater freedom on Sundays. It is, however, very picturesque to see the streets crowded with well-dressed people walking to and from their churches. Nothing could give you a greater insight into

the practical turn of the British mind, than the manner in which it turns this church-going to useful account. The men of business enlist it into their service as a good method of advertising. Macaulay tells of an English nobleman who kept himself for a long time on the ministerial bench, by walking to church with a huge Bible under one arm, and his wife on the other, followed by a number of children. All this, however, may be a misrepresentation of pure feelings. But any one who has studied the practical shape which things very often take in Britain, and has considered their flash modes of advertising, will be badly tempted to make such interpretations. Can you, I would ask, with a fact like the following before your eyes, avoid them? A clever and hard-working man told me that he had received a letter from a very holy lady, whom, during an attack of sickness, he had solicited for a debt long due. In place of the money, she enclosed him a piece of advice, admonishing him that if he were really sick, it would be more profitable for him to think of his soul than of his creditors. Such things, however, occur in every land, and most frequently among sectarians; who, whether they be guilty or not, are always obnoxious to such suspicions. Common sense, it would seem, abhors them.

I will give you just another instance of very sharp mercantile practice in religious matters. When Bishop Colenso issued the first volume of his Bible criticism, and the newspapers had duly blown their bugles about the important event, a respectable bookseller in Edinburgh placarded the streets abundantly with advertisements, intimating to the public a '*great fall in the price of Bibles.*' Colenso's work would appear to have affected his stock, just as a telegram about a battle lost or won affects the exchange.

The work of the colonial Bishop may have had nothing to do in calling forth the bookseller's placard; but the whole affair was certainly suggestive, and bore about it an undeniable air of business.

Respecting this Bible criticism of Bishop Colenso, a great deal has been written, and a great deal more spoken. Nevertheless, it is commonly remarked, that it would have fallen dead from the press, had it not been written by a Bishop. Instead of inquiring into the intrinsic worth of what has been written or said, the first question with the British is:—*Who* has written, or said it? In the same way as 'money,' and 'rank,' and 'family connection,' are 'put before men,' so as a small compensation for the indignity, men are put before reason. From such premises, such a consequence flows of itself; the public draws it after its own manner. You can feel compassion for a man, whose intellectual capacity is thus bound and dragged to the altar of Mammon. But time is in this case the High Priest, and he will shave the crown, and immolate the victim in due season. One observation suggests itself to me as characteristic; it is, that when some good idea has been laid hold of, the first thing that is sought for is a *man* who will act as its baptismal sponsor. It appears to be in Britain perfectly unintelligible, how an idea, a suggestion, or a hint can at all survive, unless it be floated away on a life-buoy of 'wealth,' or 'position.' The owners of these things must rest very securely in such a society. But when you grind the edge of an instrument too thin, you are certain to notch it. Colenso's book therefore had weight because it was written by a Bishop. Its contents and intrinsic value were of secondary importance only. When you know this, you can estimate the worth of the critics that are likely to arise in the British church, and the

effects they will produce. In one of my former letters, I hazarded some opinions on British commentators, and I will only now add that Colenso, as far as I have read his work, is no exception to the common rule. It is purely English that a man can earn, even though it should be a colonial one, still a Bishopric by dint of a mathematical turn. He may, however, be 'a gentleman by birth,' or a friend of such a one, or it may be that he has 'good connections,'—some such recommendation he must have, for I can hardly believe the British mode of preferment so absurd as to make mathematics a title to a mitre. Nevertheless, I have heard of a man being recommended as a Lord Provost, because he got a medal for some wares at the great Exhibition. With us, such recommendations would be called malicious jokes. But the British take them seriously, and generally they are highly successful. The ordinary British arguments at elections may, however, be brought to act an important underhand part, and leave such things only for show. When a man has riches sufficient, the office of Lord Provost or Lord Mayor is the usual step to a Baronetcy. Any man, in fact, is good enough when he can address satisfactorily the 'understanding,' which 'is carried' in people's 'pockets.' I am unable to adduce any specific statement respecting such understandings in the appointment of Bishops. The only expedient left me, therefore, is to believe that Colenso was really made a Bishop for his dexterity in solving algebraic formulas. If so, it was at least honest, although very primitive.

It is, to my mind, a very ludicrous spectacle to hear of such a man criticising the Bible, and see Bishops appointed on the principles above recorded, rising up to oppose him. What power can such dignitaries have to-

refute him in a scientific way? But this great nation has paralyzed itself by adopting such principles, and must bear with the scientific world, if it laughs at it. Such things, however, I will take lightly and pleasantly, leaving to others a high deportment and solemn bearing. Accordingly, instead of dilating further upon religious controversies in Britain, and the sayings of Bishops, that 'the laity has outgrown the church, especially by their geological readings,' I will call to your remembrance the anecdote of Goethe, when Fichte was driven from his professor's chair, because he had lectured and published some daring opinions about the Bible. 'What, said Schiller, rushing in to Goethe, 'have *you* signed the removal of Fichte? you know we perfectly agree with him.' 'Fool,' replied Goethe, 'people should never speak publicly about such matters—it is in bad taste.' In bad taste has been the conduct of Colenso connected with this argument. In his capacity of a public instructor of the people, he ought to have known his duty better, than to throw out upon the world ill-digested explanations of a book so dear as the Bible. It is told of King Frederick the Great, that he once asked the eminent mathematician, Euler, what he understood by integrals and differentials? 'When,' replied the professor, 'your Majesty has fully understood the foregoing portions of the science, the reply to your question will be self-evident. In the meantime, your Majesty must be content with results.' Could not Colenso have allowed the world at large to do the same, without disturbing its belief with his commentaries? Neither science nor truth would have lost anything by such a line of conduct.

I suppose you never will suspect me of becoming Catholic. But still I must confess that Catholicism has, in my opinion, a greater future in Britain than the national churches and

all their offshoots. I do not here speak of Irishmen who are crowding in, and filling up in yearly increasing numbers, the common vocations of life. I merely speak of the Catholic as contrasted with the Protestant clergy, and I find, in the comparison, ample reason for my opinion. A little trait will serve my purpose. One of the many congregations in the Scottish Highlands which, of late, have been turned out to make room for sheep and deer, happened to be wholly Catholic. The clergyman, after vainly remonstrating with the proprietor, who had adopted the creed that tenantry would not pay, but sheep would, shared, like a true shepherd, the fortunes of his flock, and accompanied them to their adopted homes in a distant colony. An English clergyman, born and brought up in the British atmosphere, would have asked, before taking such a step, 'Do you think it will pay?' Money is, no doubt, a great power, but the human heart is greater still.—I am, &c.

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## LETTER XV.

EDINBURGH, *May 22, 1863.*

It is surprising what a resemblance there exists in many important features between the life in Britain and that of our old Norse peasantry. These, you are aware, had a resident nobility, the importance of which was reckoned by the opulence and extent of their estates. To form matrimonial ties with aught but nobility, was considered to be impossible. This is the cast in which we see this feature generally appear. It is moulded by an instinct of self-preservation. The impossibility of keeping within the golden mean is, however, lost sight of, and the device in

consequence results in failure. Such of these old families of ours as have not been overpowered by common sense, and the more enlightened spirit of latter years, have become shrivelled and dried up like bits of old parchments. Their sons and daughters have seldom any personal attractions, and seldomer still any mental qualities to recommend them. They are staple commodities for laughter to the neighbouring boors. It is otherwise in Britain, where the old nobility have completely subdued society, and bound it, as it were, to their chariot wheels. These old-fashioned nobles of ours are generally upright and excellent men in their way; but they have narrow minds, and hug very egregious fallacies respecting life generally. They set, as in England, money before men, and men before reason. By acting thus, they create around them a love for money, which shews itself at times in very ludicrous shapes. I remember once seeing a servant of one of these noblemen stooping complacently, and allowing any one who had a mind, to drag an enraged cat by the tail, down his naked back, for the charge of twelve *skilling* (about sixpence). He was a true-hearted and hard-working man; but he had a somewhat religious respect for money, which prompted him to these austerities. He was, I would say, far gone in English sentiment.

During my stay in London, I occasionally went of an evening to a tavern, which, in many respects, recalled to my mind that homely one described by Goldsmith. The guests were chiefly well-to-do retired tradesmen, friendly and jovial, every one of them. But at the bare mention of money their eyes sparkled, and their gestures resembled those of our forefathers who made the hammer's sign when mentioning Thor. They gave me as a foreigner a piece of friendly advice, always to look well after my purse.

Their love of money appeared to be somewhat Platonic, however, or rather it looked like the love of an abstract principle, for they spent their money in no niggardly style. We must not therefore judge the British too severely, although we may see money assume the prerogative of a moral principle among them. We cannot, of course, suppress a smile, but that must be all, if we would not be unjust, and incur their indignation. Here, again, we are at a loss to understand each other. When in Norway, we laughed at the bloody streaks made by the cat's claws on the poor man's back, he turned round quite indignant, and said :—‘What have you to laugh at? You must work hard to earn as much as I now earn easily. You do not understand the value of money.’ But his sermon only made the laughter of the crowd more hearty. Had I known then what I know now, I might have laughed less, for I now understand better the motives and the springs of such acts. Certain it is, that the framework of British society, the politics, the elections, the appointments, and the press must necessarily engender in the common people a morbid love of money, and cast round the passion, the dignity of a moral principle. A genius who sees that he cannot work his way without abundance of money, must be a Mephistopheles in money-making, should he not prefer the fate of Chatterton. Here we come upon one of the greatest effects of the draining principle. It creates a money-making people, who run an infuriated race to a golden goal. It is but natural that such a people should be the first to reduce money-making to a scientific system, the well-meaning expounders of which are such men as Adam Smith and M'Culloch. When we now remember the geographical position of Britain and her inexhaustible resources in coal and iron, it is no wonder that Eng-

land should stand unrivalled in commerce and wealth. The right people have found their right place, and the effects are really grand. It is when looking at such a sight that a commercial genius from a foreign land builds lofty castles, and fondly dreams of *out-Englanding* England. Such European disciples of Mercury, like the British offshoots in America, are greater enthusiasts than the British themselves. True masters take matters more philosophically, and possess that natural dignity which inborn talent, and polished cultivation, always display. There is a solemnity about the mercantile duties of the British, which are not undignified when compared with those of diplomacy. They are wonderful calculators, and take all changes into account, thus making business a scientific pursuit. For my own part, I do not think I would at all feel indignant were I cheated by such accomplished masters. It would only be a just tribute to superior tact and skill. Even we possess some specimens of this mercantile school in our country, and when they begin to drive a bargain, or a sale, I am seized with the giddy feeling which is said to possess birds when the snake curls himself round and fixes his flaming eyes upon them. The fox adopts a similar mode of procedure, seizing his tail in his mouth and whirling rapidly round, till the poor bird, made giddy by watching him, drops from its roost to his feet.

‘You do not understand the value of money,’ said the man with his back lacerated by the application of the cat’s claws, and the money-makers may say the same of me. I shall, therefore, in leaving this subject, content myself with the remark, that the British have appeared to me less scientific than the German and Scandinavian merchants. They are, of course, greater adepts in the niceties of the science, but they are not so many-sided. They do not in

general know more than their own language, and they do not pass through mercantile institutes like what exist on the Continent. My experience of them is, that they are, generally speaking, deeply ignorant in everything, except their own line. The faces you meet in the streets tell you this. The intelligence and spirit of the Continent are altogether, or nearly so, wanting. This, however, acts very beneficially for money-making. I remember once of advising a highly-gifted tradesman, in whom I took some interest, to go to school and cultivate his mind. He did so, but after some time he came to me much dejected, and said, "You have ruined me in my situation, I can cheat no longer." I make no attempt by this, to cast any slur on a thing so useful as trade, or on honourable merchants. I would only show that it is quite possible to over-educate commercial people, seeing that they run the risk of growing too sensitive for the callous transactions of mercantile life. The British have also, in this respect, carried matters to their full length, thereby establishing another argument for their being considered eminently practical.

Lawyers and engineers are, in their way, generally educated just like merchants. They frequent a common school in their boyhood, and are afterwards trained for their vocation. They can display a great amount of practical skill, but the intellectual capital of the nation must, by such proceedings, be, comparatively speaking, very small. The present state of things could not endure for an hour under any other system. In this one fact you are furnished with a fair explanation of how a mighty society like the British can be brought to minister like footmen to 'gentlemen by birth.' If these people, however, be not learned or scientific, or even so well educated as it has always appeared to me they should be, they are, on the other hand, exceedingly

polite and affable. But, as they get richer, the cloven hoof comes forth, for then they feel the stings of ambition, and would set up as gentlemen. Any day, after this event, you may hear of them presenting themselves to a constituency as 'humble followers of Lord Derby,' or Palmerston. By and bye they become patrons, and, through a rare run of luck, may succeed at length in getting knighted.

When all this practical skill, combined with an innate natural love of lucre, is brought to bear on money-making, the result must be marvellous; and when this wealth falls into hands skilful enough to manipulate it, very imposing works are called into existence. The British docks, wharves, dock-yards, tunnels, bridges, archways, and canals, are things to be seen and remembered. In Scotland, where sandstone is plentiful, the buildings are grand, and in these respects, I think Britain is by far the greatest modern nation, and resembles most closely ancient Rome. It is a practical, and if you will even a rough power. Yet in many instances, in such rough works is real architectural ability displayed. The Scottish capital presents, to my view, the model of a fine city. Her greatest minds have occupied themselves with the study of how to adorn her, and as she now stands, she is a figure for Scotsmen to feel proud of. The same is the case with Glasgow and other cities, although on a smaller scale. London is huge in every sense. As I approached it, the common prejudice was sticking to me, that Britain was a land of liberty excelling far all other lands. I consequently, on sailing up the Thames, prepared myself to improvise a hymn to England's freedom and greatness. I waited, and even invoked the muse in the style of the ancients, but the goddess was shy. The sight and odours, I suppose, kept her at a distance. But the following anecdote took the place of poetic inspiration:

—Olaf, the English Hodge, who was the priest's neighbour, caused his store-house to be built close to the windows of his dwelling-house. 'My dear Olaf,' said the priest to him one day, 'why have you built the house there? it completely shuts out the beautiful prospect of the river, the glen, the woods, and the mountains.' 'What of that?' answered Olaf, 'the house contains flesh, meat, and flour, and meal, and corn, and butter, and ham, and these are the most beautiful things I know of.' Olaf, with his practical philosophy on the fine arts, would have been enraptured with London, and have composed the hymn I was unable to write. When closely examined, however, there are objects in London well calculated to inspire nobler sentiments than those of Olaf. The house of Parliament, St Paul's, and Westminster Abbey, are reckoned among the greatest works of the kind. But the greatness of the last is certainly more internally than externally. There lie most of England's great men. It is like a holy pilgrimage to wander there amid the shrines of departed genius. It was while doing so that a remarkable trait in the English mind first struck me. Nobles who have left no name in history, and are only known by a reference to the peerage, have found their way to the very neighbourhood of Shakspeare, Newton, and Stephenson. I could there see the nobility of parchment crouching behind the tombs of the nobility of genius, and trying to find a shelter from oblivion, beside the dust of men, whom living, they would in all likelihood have ignored. It appears to me to be exceedingly bad taste to join these nobles in death, when by the social laws of England such a distance separated them in life. Their spheres were altogether different, whatever their merits may have been, and Westminster Abbey is no graveyard, where all are mingled together in one common dust.

England is a beautiful, as well as a rich country. I wandered about, crossing many 'broad ducal and baronial streams,' and 'quiet gentry rivulets.' It is diversified with lawns, meadows, groves, and parks laid out with taste, and beautifully diversified. These proprietors have a fine life of it in the country, and to be entertained by them there, with British hospitality, must surely be charming. Wandering with staff in hand as a pilgrim, it was impossible for me to share it, and I can therefore give you no personal experience of the matter, but if I may conclude from the poorer classes, the rich well deserve the character so often bestowed on them of being eminently hospitable. I felt hurt, nevertheless, at seeing such contrasts of wealth and poverty in this lovely land. A dark ground with the bushes and the grass stunted by the overshadowing of great trees—such is the appearance of Britain with its nobles and ignobles. It is not even natural mingling of blossoms and stunted flowers, with mighty oaks and lowly bushes. It is nature grievously outraged. Old baronial castles, and strongholds of the middle ages, are numerous throughout the country, but I did my best to eschew all feelings of romance when I visited them. To me they looked like mouldering bones sticking half out from the graveyard of history.

Without an opposing force, our spirit would fare like our body in a vacuum. A British capitalist, if his breed be unobjectionable, is a very independent despot. Intellect has no power to bridle him, as in other countries. He lives in an atmosphere of adulation. There is an Oriental air about him, and these Oriental despots, like the Roman ones, were entirely unaccountable beings, just because they had no resistance. They were enclosed in a vacuum, and it is not generally such men who have ears to hear

the pauperised millions and pinched bloodless operatives. Reasoning thus, it is my wonder that in such a land as Britain there should really exist so much common sense.

England can, however, for a long time yet to come, send to the colonies these millions, just as we fling away the refuse of the orange when the juice is squeezed out of it. Europe has much to learn from England in the way of emigration. It has been her safety-valve, without it she would long since burst like a bomb-shell. The prospect which, for instance, M'Culloch points out for Britain is to my mind not at all bright. A time is talked of when Britain will be as a trading and manufacturing city for the universe. Her situation, it is said, points out such a destiny for her. When such a thing happens, there will be city on city like London, and the surrounding land will be a huge sheep farm. But then is the end of Britain come. She will be treated as a gardener was wont to treat his bees. She will be smoked to death for her honey. But iron ships, and iron forts, monster guns, and such other devices, may perhaps supersede all ancient experiences respecting wars and the condition of a country which is resolved to maintain its independence. The devolving progress of what usually is called civilisation, leaves room for plenty of conjectures, and even of dreams. It is an idle, but it is an interesting experiment for philosophers to look upon civilisation as a patient, to feel its pulse, and make vivisections. At all events, the patient does not wince, whatever benefit may accrue from such treatment.

Meanwhile, we are left to look at matters as they stand. But the present time is only the trunk of the tree. Its roots are in bye-gone times, and its top stretches into the future. If we would understand it, we must have the whole. Hence, we are compelled to investigate on the one

side, and on the other to draw inferences, or it may be to dream. They are narrow-minded or short-sighted, who cling to the present state of things, or are in British phrase, practical.

I have already remarked that the British imagine they exercise an unbounded moral power over Europe. Both in their writings and conversations they shew themselves keenly alive to this belief. It is also, to a certain extent, true; but the reason it is so, is that European nations are generally very ignorant about the affairs of Britain. Upon a more minute examination, I fear, good grounds will be found for addressing her in the words of Dryden—

‘ For how can she constrain them to obey,  
Who has herself cast off the lawful sway ! ’

If the quotations I have adduced be at all of any worth, they furnish reason enough for such an address. The moral influence which England exercises is, I think, built on the very physical foundation of her ‘iron clads.’ Such influences betwixt nations generally are based on warlike strength, inasmuch, as mutual interests and friendly feelings possess not the power to cement nationalities together in the bonds of peace. Again, it is admitted by the British press, that Britain, as ‘a commercial country,’ can only take interest in a good customer. This propensity to drive a bargain, and transact business, is of itself quite capable of involving England in war, either in Europe or in Asia, if her neighbours should turn a deaf ear to her doctrines about free trade, and the laws of supply and demand. When the *Times* speaks about the political situation of Spain and Greece, it commonly asserts that these countries have lost their moral influence, and that it is impossible to sympathise with them, because they are not always punctual in paying the interest of their debts to the

British shareholders. This may, or may not, be a true deduction; it, at all events, shows that money is the unity of measure for outward, as well as inward greatness, and every country from such a confession can make up its mind how to act towards England, and what to expect from her in times of great emergencies. Of course, every country must act in its own interest, but the difference between this and a confessed avowal of commercial principles in the highest interests of mankind is great. The British are consequent. If, therefore, to any country should be given the choice to side either with England or with France, certainly the best and ablest minds would lean towards France. Study France, and you will find that in spite of all her errors and her mistakes, she has ever had, compared with England, a stronger propensity towards ideality, both in thinking and writing, and even in fighting. A Frenchman can fight and die for an idea, but the tenor of English writings and politics do not seem likely to produce such sentiments. Speak with a Frenchman or a German, and you will at once feel you are standing on ideal ground, drinking, like our old god Thor, from a horn, the other end of which is placed in the ocean. How different is the conversation, generally speaking, with a 'practical Englishman.' I speak here, as in other grave matters, from the manner in which I have been affected. Let other travellers and writers study and judge for themselves.

It would appear that the British themselves have some suspicion of how they are placed in this respect. The Volunteer force was an effort caused by this suspicion. The enthusiasm for this movement begins, however, now to abate, and the legislature is accordingly about to take steps for making this force a kind of permanent militia, which will certainly influence society if anything can.

There will now and then be found in its ranks independent men, who will there get hold of a lever capable of being used with formidable effect, if only they understand how to use it. Such notions must, however, still be a long way off, and it is problematical if at any time they find their way into a society so well soldered with gold as the British. The Volunteer force is mostly made up of men from manufacturing firms and offices. They may be good shots, and at reviews make some very pretty turns, but I must say that they look as if they would be but inefficient soldiers in a real campaign. They are pale and sickly, and to me prophetic of the ultimate results of commerce and manufactures. I may, however, be wrong, for the British themselves assert that the operatives have excellent muscles. This may be true for a time of such of them as have been born and brought up in the country; but to see these manufacturing multitudes on Sundays, it is a sight to provoke tears. They are generally well, and even gaudily dressed—but it is like the tinsel trappings that surround a bier. Life seems within them flickering on the wane. Think for a moment, that in the places where that sallow-faced multitude ought to be, sheep are grazing—and if you feel not depressed, you love mankind less than I gave you credit for. ‘Put the red coat on the sheep and the deer,’ the solitary Highlander may tell the recruiting officer, when he appears at his shieling door.

The Volunteer movement proved to a certain extent a failure in the country, in spite of all the exertions of the larger proprietors. Indeed, there appears to me to have been very little volunteering in the whole affair. It has been more or less a pressure, although not so great as the press-gang might have employed. The British boast they have no conscription. Many well to-do people have certainly

become Volunteers, but the great body has stood aloof. This is but natural. There can, however, be no doubt but that the Volunteers would fight well. The British have always done so. They are brave, and even reckless of life. So are also their aristocratic youths, who buy their commissions, and are innocently ignorant of military science. In most cases they must be so. The letters of Cornwallis show how thoroughly ill-organised and appointed the English army was when Napoleon threatened invasion; and the *Cornhill*, on '*Invasion Panics*,' fancies that 'a future edition of the Panmure papers, and Herbert's memoirs, bearing on the disasters of the Crimean war, may not entirely differ from those with which we have become acquainted through the Cornwallis correspondence.' Still the system cannot be reformed. It is part and parcel of the Government, and the administration of public affairs. To change it would be to put *men* before money, and this might revolutionise the whole British empire.

Everybody knows how eagerly the British are employed in bringing about the reconstruction of their fleet. The most curious thing is, how there can be any man of weight who does not feel the necessity of making all possible efforts for arming in every shape? It must, however, only be a party manoeuvre, for I can hardly believe any man so blind as not to see the real situation. No man of sense can have any faith in a lasting peace—at least now with wars all around him—the thing is Utopian. England must be armed to the teeth; for, if I may judge from her writers, she is by no means anxious to allay the angry feelings which have existed between France and her for centuries. Were I an Englishman, I would feel very uneasy reading the British press when it treats of France and her emperor. Even Mr Kinglake, in his recent his-

tory of the Crimean war, cannot withstand the common propensity. He ceases to be an historian, for the sake of becoming a pamphleteer. And even Lord Brougham interfered, last winter, with the French administration of justice in the criminal proceedings of a French lady. He seemed to forget the criminal justice of his own country, about which the *Times*, October 22, wrote—‘Catharine Wilson fell under suspicion, and *escaped as clever criminals, aided by clever counsels, do escape in this country.*’ The British writings about the battle of Waterloo, last summer, were provoked by M. Thiers’ history; but this is a sore point, which sensible people will do well to avoid as much as possible. Upon the whole, it seems to a stranger a very curious proceeding to keep alive this disagreeable feeling with a dear ally and a mighty neighbour. Officially, all may be friendly and well, but it is dangerous ‘to beard the lion in his den,’ for it is not a result of scientific and impartial researches into the constitution of a foreign country, but a daily irritation. The French, as far as I have seen, do not take matters quite thus. It is, however, the opposite ideas represented by these two mighty countries, which enlist writers into their service, even against their will. The bearings of these my letters will show you that I make France the progressive, and England the reactionary power; and I entertain no great fear of being gainsaid by history, when all the documents have been brought to light.—I am, &c.

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## LETTER XVI.

EDINBURGH, May 27, 1863.

I HAVE now reached my limit, and must close, despite the

deep regret I feel in leaving themes so rich and fertile. I may, however, console myself with the reflection that many will think I have written more than enough. Thus alleviated, I can therefore be brief in this, my last letter, which I shall lay out, partly in taking a retrospect, and partly in adducing some new quotations and remarks on subjects already referred to. If, after all, I should not be so concise as I would like—excuse me on the ground of the old saying; for, indeed, I have no time for brevity.

One word by way of retrospect. When I spoke of nations and individuals framing to themselves codes of morality adapted to their peculiar views and peculiar interests, I wished only to convey to you an idea of the facility with which even the eternal code of morals is made to yield to ruling passions or prejudices.

I have already, at different times, had occasion to speak of trial by jury. It is very often called an English institution, because England has managed to keep it alive when along with other institutions from the middle ages, it fell to pieces on the Continent. Read Egil's and Niall's Saga, for example, and you will see our old jury in its full development. The English jury at the present day has so strong a family likeness to it, that you at once recognise it. Our dear excellent forefathers were as pretty pettifoggers as any of their neighbours. But they were wise enough to have recourse to the sword when false constructions on the law did not sufficiently serve their purpose. A court of justice generally finished up with a battle. Each party had its retainers and men wise in the law, and so they fought first with arguments, and afterwards with sharper weapons. This last resort is sadly missed in present systems like the English, where evasions, and hampering forms, play so important parts. The principle that no

man is bound to criminate himself, is a fine abstract principle; but when it is stretched, and allows a man under the strongest suspicions to remain silent, and if he do speak to take counsel how to answer, in order to evade contradictions; then is justice really reduced to the cast of a die, or a game of chance, or the running of a race between the accused and justice. It is just the opposite extreme of the rack. Would it not, do you think, be better to steer between these rocks, and examine a man without compulsion, taking down his words carefully, and comparing them with the testimony of witnesses, all to be submitted to the close scrutiny of the judges; and an appeal entered with what additional information may have transpired after the first sentence? But in the trial by jury, there are no such precautions taken. All is in the old style, and the poor jurymen are compelled to form in one sitting a rough estimate of the question at issue between the contending parties. Even the judge at times must be sadly bewildered, and his estimate of the case somewhat rough. The public feel that such justice is not to be relied upon. They subscribe to retain high-class advocates, and get up monster petitions when the first and ultimate sentence has been pronounced. In the famous 'Glasgow murder case,' such was the course taken. The newspapers and periodicals give out their views, which, juridically speaking, are worthless. This is called publicity—a sort of benign fairy which makes every thing right. One of two, either the British criminals must be more hardened sinners than ours, or there must be a very great many judicial murders, for in most cases convicts go to the scaffold protesting innocence, and appealing to the justice of posterity. An idea, in fact, more awful than this cannot be encountered. I witnessed some trials by jury, and the impression

made upon me was, that it was a perfect lottery. It might be right, but it was so only by chance. I tried in vain to find any scientific conclusion, and as an advocate of some practice, I felt the full truth of the opinion of the *Times*, that a clever criminal, aided by clever counsels, can easily escape. A talented advocate may upset any criminal procedure he pleases, if the accused be shrewd and only know the worth of keeping silent. The judge and the jury must, in such cases, either give up the unravelling of the knot as hopeless, or have recourse to Alexander's method of undoing it. No doubt, many of the British judges are talented men, and this I think, is the fact which keeps matters a-going. These cannot, however, be any guarantee for justice being administered under such a system. And yet this system is held up to admiration by travellers from different countries. I dare say, however, many of these are led by what the British themselves say about it. I need not tell you that the British find it perfectly matchless, although some very learned men, Blackstone among others, seem to harbour some doubts of its real utility. It is an egregious fallacy to say that a jury chosen from merchants and farmers are the best judges of a case. It is contrary to all rational division of labour, and I cannot safely rely upon the combined judgment of any body of men who do not know more individually than I myself know. This is the very foundation of our confidence in the judgment of God; to be judged by one's peers is in reality a barbarous principle. But lawyers can, for generations to come, go to England and see such a system, and hear it called a Palladium. They cannot even reform the police of London in the very face of garrotting and such like Metropolitan outrages. Hear what the *Times* writes upon this matter, May 4:—'No better measure can be

afforded of the reaction since the days when the cry of "Radical Reform" was popular, than the apathy into which the public mind is plunged so deeply, that nothing seems capable of rousing it. Formerly, we used to think that an abuse proved and denounced, was more than half remedied. Now all is changed. One abuse detected, convicted, and denounced, is never so safe as at the moment when it would appear to be awaiting almost immediate destruction. If a thing is theoretically bad, it is sure to be said to "work well," if a thing is practically inconvenient and mischievous, it is sure to rest upon some very sound foundation; if a thing is both wrong in theory, and mischievous in practice, it must be preserved for fear of offending the prejudices of persons who believe they have an interest in preserving it, or in preserving something else more or less like it.

Reforms of any kind have no great chance in such a land, for there will always be found some prejudices and interests to prevent them. And a press which cannot take the legislature by storm upon such a subject as the London police, is not likely to prove very much worth upon matters more dubious. When garroting was in its most flourishing condition, the *Times*, Nov. 7, said:—"The machinery now maintained for the protection of life and property is altogether insufficient." I suppose that most other nations would have been alarmed by such avowals, justified by the daily facts; but the British take it very coolly, and prefer arming themselves, rather than acting upon principles. They would rather knock out the brains of a real man, than encounter ghosts. It is a mode of argumentation much of the same kind as that of throwing mud upon a disagreeable politician, instead of withdrawing all power from himself, and trampling on his principles.

It is an interesting fact, that the old laws in every nation

are always found surrounded by a crust of formulas. It is one extreme creating its opposite. No laws are so crushed by the dead weight of formalities as the old half-poetical ones. Modern, well-defined laws, afford more scope for the spirit and common sense. Formalities in law-suits are, therefore, as sure a sign of barbarity in a nation, as any other trait you can meet with. The British formalities in law are well known, although, of late years, many of them have been dispensed with. Such intricate matters are, however, far beyond the comprehension of any foreigner who has not spent years in their study. So far, however, as I have seen, there is much of the old machinery still working. You meet the old Roman system in its *actiones*, and *interdicta*, and *testamenti factio*, and also in what I would call the etiquette of the bench and the bar. They have even their inns and their halls. Under such a system a good advocate must be something like all-important, and able to set upon his services what price he lists. Hence, a process is so expensive in Britain, that justice is in reality reduced to a question of money. This is, however, in the very best keeping with the other institutions and customs of the land, and a reform in this branch would only be an anomaly. If, therefore, you wish to fleece a man in England, follow the advice given in the old saying, and do not leave a particle of wool on him; for if he can defray the enormous expenses of an action, you are far from safe. Curious enough, public functionaries seem to be regarded as private individuals in law-suits; and they do not seem obliged to exculpate themselves from dishonest imputations, and even the Government appears to take no heed of such matters. I have seen imputations urged against very high functionaries, and no notice whatever taken of them, in quarters which, with us, would have compelled the

accused to clear the stain from his character, however low might be the condition of the accuser. Such things, people told me, were private affairs.

In the British Government, we find an old institution, still more characteristic even than trial by jury. The three powers in the State, which newer theories and forms keep separate, are there, in the old style, combined. The Parliament is, in reality, executive, legislative, and judicial. This, of course, gives it a huge importance, and endows it with absolute authority. To be at the head of the Government is, therefore, only to command a majority in Parliament, and thus possess what is called the confidence of the nation. This characteristic fact is generally overlooked by foreign admirers, who speak about the British as a model for countries, where these three powers are kept in their organic state, separated, and mutually checking each other, by an entirely different mode of operation from that seen in Britain. For this reason, the British are in the habit of speaking very much beside the question when they treat of other constitutions and parliaments. They judge of others by themselves, and hence confusion is engendered on all sides.

The Lord Chancellor unites in his person the twofold character of president of the supreme courts of law, and president of the upper house, in other constitutions. The Prime Minister somewhat resembles the president of the lower house. The Speaker is only a regulating functionary, well-versed in the forms of procedure. The English Solicitor-General, and the Scottish Lord Advocate, are the representatives of law in the lower house. The members of Parliament are not supposed to be possessed of any special knowledge to entitle them to election—neither do they in general possess any. The privileged class does

not descend to such annoying specialities. Even the *Times* confesses that there is a political caste. It says, April 23 :— 'There is undoubtedly in this country something like a political caste, which, devoting itself from early manhood to politics, succeeds in almost monopolizing the highest offices of State.' And, farther on, it talks of 'the exclusiveness of aristocratic ministers, and the little real liberalism they possess.'

The ministry has ample means of securing to itself a majority in the Parliament. It is, in our acceptation of the word, the executive power, and as such, it enters into contracts, such as the 'Galway' and the 'Dover Mail Service.' It has also a fund at its disposal known as the secret service-money, and it has subordinate posts in the revenue and customs; it has governor-ships in foreign colonies, it has seats on the bench, and mitres to dispose of at home—in fact, 'the arguments carried in the pocket' must, at enhanced prices, necessarily carry the same amount of conviction in the struggles of parliamentary parties, as they do in the contests round the hustings.

The Numidian king did not hesitate for a moment to enter upon his daring schemes of rapine and ambition, when he had received from his friends the solemn assurance :—

'Omnia Romæ venalia esse,'

I am, &c.

## A P P E N D I X.

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It is with regret I mention the opinion set down in the text, for I look upon the gradual disappearance of the old European languages from a somewhat serious point of view. I have myself, along with some others, been endeavouring, for several years back, to restore, and again establish in Norway, a purer Norse language. As such a movement may appear to Englishmen eccentric, and as an insight into its nature and scope may possibly prove of interest to the students of philology, I shall here, by way of appendix, sketch briefly its history and progress.

I must begin by correcting a mistake into which many British historical and philological writers have fallen. They go upon the belief that the Icelandic and old Norwegian or Norse languages are different; now, the fact is that they are one and the same language. Down to the end of the fourteenth century, when the Norse crown descended to the Dane, we find no perceptible difference between the language in Norway and in Iceland. At that period, however, we come upon the beginnings of a change. Throughout the country, Danish influences were in the ascendant. Functionaries entrusted with the administration were trained in Danish Universities. A Danish literature rose into fashion, and the old Norse, forced to yield to a more powerful rival, retreated to the dells and mountains, where it has been preserved down to the present day by a stalwart and hardy peasantry. The remote and isolated position of Iceland offered to the old tongue a still more secure retreat. Thus it was, that the Norse language was displaced by the Danish, as the Anglo-saxon was by the French, with this important difference, however, that the relationship between Norse and Danish was closer than that between French and Anglo-

Saxon. Norse and old Danish differed very slightly at first, but in the lapse of time, their features became more and more unlike. The Government of Denmark left Norway, in a great measure, to rely on her own resources, while it endeavoured to compensate itself for the loss of the rich province of Skaane by turning its eyes southward to Germany, thus entailing upon the present generation, the Sleswick-Holstein question. These Germanic tendencies of Denmark produced a marked change upon her language. German words and idioms were received into it, until it became totally corrupted. These corruptions were partly imported into the Bible translation which Norway had received from Denmark, and which continued in use there down to 1814.

At that period, Norway separated from Denmark, and became united, under one king, with Sweden. The political separation from Denmark did not, however, prevent Danish literature from still maintaining its former sway. This can be explained by the analogous fact in physical science, that a body moves on, even after the action of the moving power has been withdrawn. The preconceived force is, however, gradually dying out, and Norway having now nearly settled the more urgent claims of self-government, finds time and leisure to devote attention to the consideration of her language; which is, after all, the distinguishing mark of a nation's individuality, and without which even political independence is more apparent than real.

The representative of this linguistic movement is Professor Keiser. I choose to mention him in preference to others, as he is an apt type of the reactionary and timid spirit we often see united with professions of root and branch reformers.

Keiser is by birth a Norseman, by education a Dane. He fills the chair of old Norse, and old Norse history, in the University of Christiania. His labours in this capacity for the last thirty years have exercised a very general, and very beneficial influence, which he has ably seconded by his writings and researches into the ancient Norse history and language. His publications come before the world written in the Danish language—for he would be horrified at the idea of writing pure Norse. With all this, however, he is constantly borne away by his Norse nature. Norse idioms, Norse phrases, Norse words, and even spellings escape from the pen, in spite of every precaution of the writer

Professor Munch does not share the pusillanimity of Keiser. On the contrary, he advised some years ago that our literature should at once go back to about the year 1500, and at that point enter upon its new career. His practice is, however, at variance with his principles. In all his published works, and they are voluminous, he has written pretty nearly in the usual literary strain, contenting himself with restoring to their civic rights several Norse words and phrases. Our poets and novelists have nearly done the same—each in his own way taking a step or two into the Rubicon, but none of them seeming to care about walking boldly on to the opposite side.

The little that has been done by these writers has, withal, tended to widen the gulf between Danish and Norse literature; insomuch that Danes, now-a-days, complain that they cannot fully understand our Norse language without the help of a dictionary. Some twenty years ago, a new impulse was given to our literary development. Away in the wild district of Møre—a district of islands, fiords, and mountains—there lived a young man who, in his capacity of schoolmaster, had applied himself with wonderful energy to the task of self-culture. He perused, and to some purpose, all the works which that poor region could supply to him. The libraries of the captain and the clergyman he speedily exhausted. But it was in old Norse literature that he was most deeply read. It was indeed, to a certain extent, his mother tongue. The discrepancies between that language, as he read it in the old Sagas, and heard it spoken by the people, prompted him to carry his investigations deeply in that direction. The encouragement he got was small. The old objection was repeated, 'The change of language is an accomplished fact not to be altered—the old dialects may do well enough for boors, but they will not do for educated people, least of all for a Scriptural language.' The lad wondered at all this, but as he saw no way out of it, he set about collecting botanical instead of philological roots, and proceeded with them to Bergen. The bishop and the head-master of the grammar school in Bergen gave a decided preference to his linguistic rareties over his botanical specimens. They introduced him to the chairman of the Society of Sciences in Throndeim; an annual stipend was conferred upon him, and he was appointed to travel about the country and compare the dialects one with another. The result

of these researches he gave to the world in a grammar and dictionary of the language of the 'Norse folk.' Both works have raised their author to fame, and enjoy a high reputation among our best men of letters. The author is known to the world as Ivar Aasen. He still continues his labours—improving his works, and gathering the various dialects as much as possible under one standard. He has besides published several original works, all marked with a skill and taste which make his efforts respected, even by those who cannot fall in with his philological schemes.

I must mention here a work of some importance connected with this movement. Among the Thelemorkish folk, there were still preserved, in their original beauty and purity, many fine old Norse songs. The collection of these, words and melodies, was the task of different individuals, at different times. Far and wide, throughout that romantic land of lakes and mountains, men wandered on their linguistic tours; writing down from the faltering lips of its aged inhabitants, many a musical and literary treasure—snatched thus, like brands from the burning. The fruits of such labours, after revisal by Ivar Aasen, were given to the world in a goodly volume of songs. The work is still going on; the riches extracted by myself and others being apparently unmissed in a mine of inexhaustible wealth.

Among these songs are some of the old ballads known at an early stage in most literatures of Europe—but the greater part of them are indigenous lyric, and some half-dramatic. They have been handed down orally from generation to generation, improved in their descent by touches from master-minds, and arriving at us in a state of perfection and preservation beyond all praise. These will, I maintain, form the nucleus of our regenerated literature, and the more so, as the dialect is pure, rich, and living. This is the language which I am in the habit of writing, taking in my difficulties the advice of Ivar Aasen. There is then no real difference of aim between him and me, save that I write to be read, and must now and then yield to circumstances, while he is a learned inquirer, and looks more at the theoretical side of the question. For the space of three years, I have, with some slight interruptions, put forth weekly a newspaper written in this Norse. My readers are at times sorely puzzled. The spelling of many known words is completely altered, and I am often forced to use

words never before seen in print by those not conversant with old Norse. Even, however, to those tolerably well read in that literature, new words are constantly turning up, for it possesses great facilities for the formation of such new words, the old roots being clear and comparatively pure; whereas in Danish they are corrupted and settled, and, therefore, organic growth is no longer possible. There is no need of having recourse to the Latin. The language is rich enough in itself, possessing a vocabulary capable of giving expression to all the moral and mental qualities, the expression of which constitutes the nobility of a language. Most modern languages have borrowed such expressions from the Latin. Marsh instances this very clearly with the English, by enumerating a long list of those noble words from Anglo-Saxon, which writers have gradually dropped, and so made their language a reflex of their social state with an imported nobility. Some very important features of resemblance to the English occur in our elder Norse language. Words, constructions, and even pronunciations are strikingly alike, and throw an interesting light upon either language. The light would be stronger, were it not that the Scottish and English dialects are in a fair way of becoming extinct. Let us hope that able men will rescue what can be rescued, and that the Norse and English languages will be compared. Betwixt the Swedish language and ours there are, properly speaking, but few discrepancies, and these are more apparent than real. The Swedish seems to be the only European language which has escaped the linguistic barbarities of the middle ages. Marsh characterizes it very well:—"The Swedes," says he, 'pronounce the consonants, in general, as well as the vowels, with a distinctness of resonance which justifies the boast of Tegner, that the ring of Swedish is as clear as that of metal.' I would go further, and say that history justifies the boast of Tegner, that Sweden is a country of heroes, and I would set down this heroism as the cause of the metallic purity of its language. There is the same strength in the mouth as in the arm, and the tongue speaks as clearly as the sword. We always see that vice, weakness, and cowardice, are the causes of the corruption of languages. Had not our exhausted Norway, in the fifteenth century, yielded to Denmark, there would have been no room for our present linguistic strife and struggle.

And now, by way of conclusion, I shall here briefly advert to a

political view of the question, which offers itself to me as important. We three Scandanavian nationalities—Danish, Swedish, and Norse—are so distinctly one, and opposed to other nationalities, that we must keep together for the sake of self-preservation. But that this holding together may not prove a failure like the Calmar union, no one of these nationalities must be absorbed by the others, but have its own autonomy in language, literature, legislation, and government. Natural products, mode of living, and the social constitution are so different, that an amalgamation is impossible. But, even if it were possible, it would be both impolitic and unnecessary. We are as strong against the outer world as we could be. A tyrant, a despot, or an ambitious conqueror—were such characters possible in so small a commonwealth—would receive a more violent check from these autonomies than from the action of a single compact kingdom. Nor would I ascribe this to the fact of there being, as in this case, two or three constitutions—written constitutions being, in great emergencies, only so much waste-paper—but I would refer it to the wider freedom of the public voice, the diversified action of the people, and the inability of any conspirator against the national liberties to cope with the defensive schemes which such social discrepancies of character would produce. With reference to the autonomy of these three literatures, the case is precisely the same. They must freely develop their own resources, and by action and reaction upon each other, approach. In this way, time will shew whether they inwardly coalesce, as they are outwardly combined, against invading enemies.





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